

January 3, 2021 by Steve Brandon



A Bold Witness

Acts 4:1-12

1. Faces Conflict (verses 1-4)

2. Preaches Christ (verses 5-12)

This past week, Yvonne and I were out walking in our neighborhood. It was just after our big snow on Tuesday. We happened upon a woman a few doors down from us. Her entire driveway was shoveled clean. But she just had a little bit at the end of her driveway near the street where the snowplow had plowed up a large pile of snow. For some reason, we began talking. It just came into my heart that she would be helped immensely if I would just finish her shoveling job for her. It would take about five minutes of my time. But it looked like it would take a lot longer of her time.

So I took her shovel and began to shovel away the last little bit of her driveway. She was shocked at how quickly I was able to shovel the snow. She, obviously, was not able to do so as quickly as I was. She explained how she had been shoveling the entire driveway all day, going out and shoveling what she could, until she was exhausted. Then she went out again a few hours later, shoveling until she couldn't anymore.

Seeing how quickly I was going, she continued in her overflowing praise of how quickly I was shoveling her snow. And then she asked, "What kind of job do you do that enables you to be so strong?" I'm ready for that answer. I told her what I have often told others to try to open a door for spiritual conversation. I said, "I'm a pastor. I have a wonderful job. I teach the Bible and spend my time telling others how their sins can be forgiven through faith in Jesus."

We had a good conversation after that. She needs a local church. I invited her to church. I showed her where we live. I told her that we would be willing to give her a ride. Who knows, maybe she's watching online this morning. If so, that's wonderful! That's why we speak to others about Jesus. We want to see others believe and trust in Christ. We want to help them in their walk of faith at church through the ministry of the church.

Well, what took place this past Tuesday is what often takes place when having opportunity to be a witness to Jesus. Often, there is some event or some conversation that gives rise to speak about Jesus. To use Paul's terminology, it's an "open door" (Colossians 4:3; Acts 14:27). God's call on our lives is to walk through the open doors and open our mouths and talk about Jesus. So when you walk through the "open door," open your mouth.

That's what it means to be "be a witness" for Jesus. It means telling others of what you have seen and heard and experienced in your walk with Christ. This is the theme of the book of Acts: "Be My Witnesses."

Jesus calls us all to be his witness to others. We began our study of the book of Acts in the fall. We took a break during the Christmas season, and we are now coming back to it this morning. And so, since it has been a while since we have been in Acts, let's just review a little bit.

The book of Acts tells the story of the history of the early church, covering some 30-40 years of history. It's a book of triumph! Triumph of the gospel, spreading throughout the whole known world. The book of Acts begins with Jesus, resurrected from the dead, giving his final instructions to his disciples. Over a forty day time period, he poured into them, talking with them about the kingdom of God. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come upon them. The theme verse comes in verse 8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus was telling these disciples that they would receive power to be his witnesses. Their witnessing activity would begin in Jerusalem where they were. It would then extend to Judea (to their immediate south) and Samaria (to their immediate north). Then, their witness would spread out, even to the end of the earth.

This is what the book of Acts is all about. It's about Jesus building his church through the Holy Spirit empowering his followers to be his witnesses throughout the world. This is where we get the application for us today, to be witnesses of all that we have seen and experienced of Jesus.

Anyway, after saying these things, Jesus ascended into heaven. Ten days later, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, just as Jesus had promised. This event is told in Acts, chapter 2. The Holy Spirit falls upon the disciples and empowers them to speak in tongues. That is, other languages, previously unknown to them. Naturally, such an event caused much confusion in Jerusalem. This is the event that Peter used to be a witness for Christ. Peter stood up and proclaimed the gospel, describing how this is exactly what was prophesied in the Old Testament in Joel, chapter 2, with sons and daughters seeing visions and prophesying. All of this is merely confirmation that God has made Jesus "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), seated in heaven, awaiting the time when his enemies would be made his footstool.

When the people realized that it was the very Jesus who they crucified, they were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). On that day, three thousand people repented of their sins, were baptized, and added to the church (Acts 2:41). The church was together in harmony, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The church was doing well as "the Lord [was adding] to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

A short time later, Peter and John healed a lame man. This story is told in chapter 3. They had gone up the temple at the hour of prayer (3pm). They saw this forty year-old man sitting at the temple gate, begging for money. Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). And he did! In fact, more than walk, he leapt about, praising God for his newfound health!

Like with the coming of the Holy Spirit (and the speaking in tongues), this miracle provided Peter with an opportunity to be a witness. Again, there's the event that Peter used to be a witness for Christ. Peter preached in the Solomon's portico, that it was God who did the healing. This is the same God of the Jews, the same God who raised Jesus from the dead, who will someday return to set all things right.

Then things turned in the book of Acts. We read in chapter 4 of how Peter and John were arrested and rebuked for preaching the gospel. Until this time, apparently, followers of Christ were welcome in the temple area. At the beginning of chapter 3, we Peter and John heading up to the temple to pray, along with all of the Jews, who were there to pray. Even in chapter 2, we read that, " (and verse 46), we read that "day by day [they were] attending the temple together" (Acts 2:46).

I think that the apostles were so welcome in the temple area because the Jews hadn't fully understood the message of Christ and all of the implications of the gospel. But now, in chapter 4, we see that the Jews have figured it out. They have figured out that the message that these Christians are bringing isn't in harmony with what they were teaching. So, the Jewish authorities arrest the apostles and seek to intimidate them into being silent. Yet, this didn't stop them. Rather, they continued to be bold in their witness.

Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning, "A Bold Witness." This is what Peter and John were doing. They were being "Bold Witnesses" for Jesus. Their boldness got them in trouble, but this very trouble is the event that gave them an opportunity to be a witness for Jesus. So, let's read our text, ...

Acts 4:1-12

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

We see the conflict that Peter and John experience in the first part of the text. We see their response in the second part of the text. Through it all, they were bold. The leaders recognized this. "They saw the boldness of Peter and John" (Acts 4:13). When this event is all done, they pray for boldness. Here's what they prayed, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness" (Acts 4:29). God answered the prayer. "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:13). This chapter is all about boldness in speaking to others about Jesus.

Here's my first point, "A Bold Witnesses ..."

1. Faces Conflict (verses 1-4)

This is what we see in the first half of our text. Let's read again, ...

Acts 4:1-3

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

Now, it's no accident that these people were not pleased with the preaching of Peter and John. First of all, the very fact that they were teaching was offensive to them. They were not educated in the schools of the Rabbis. They hadn't received the proper training. As one commentator said, this was "unauthorized preaching by unprofessional preachers."^[1]

The second, and perhaps more important, they were preaching the resurrection. We can see one instance of this back in chapter 3, "You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:15). Of all the things that the disciples said, this was, by far, the most offensive thing they said in their preaching. See, the Sadducees were the liberals of the day. They didn't believe in the resurrection. Luke tells us this explicitly in Acts 23:8 that they didn't believe in the resurrection. (You know how to remember that right? The Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection, which makes them "sad-you-see." These are the Sadducees.)

The Sadducees were also the ones in political power, which means that they were able to arrest Peter and John. So, the commanding officer of the temple police force arrested them and put them in jail. It is worthy to note in verse 3, that they were taken to jail because "it was already evening." Do you remember when they went up to the temple to pray? They went "at the hour of prayer" (3:1), which was the ninth hour (3:1), which was 3pm.

But now, it was evening, close to sunset, which we can assume was somewhere near 6pm. This means that Peter and John had been in the temple for a few hours teaching the people and proclaiming Christ to the all throughout the afternoon and evening. So, chapter 3 and verse 15 wasn't the only time that they had mentioned Jesus, risen from the dead.

Certainly, preaching and teaching for several hours, their message came through loud and clear. They were followers of a teacher from Galilee, named Jesus. "He was amazing," they would say. He taught them with great wisdom. He was able to heal all sorts of illnesses. He was a prophet like no other. Jesus had told them that he would die in Jerusalem at the hand of the religious leaders of the city. He also told them that he would rise from the dead. Indeed this is exactly what happened. They saw him risen from the dead. They walked with him and talked with him. Jesus explained to them the way of the kingdom of God, that you enter the kingdom through the way of repentance and faith.

Because of their message, they spent the night in jail. This is because, a bold witness, "Faces Conflict." For us the same is true. To the extent that you bring Jesus into the conversations of your life, you will face conflict as well. It is how the Christian life works. It is what God has called us to be and do. We are called to be bold witnesses for Jesus, and deal godly with the conflict that comes.

In the case of Peter and John, it meant a night in the jail. Though the Sadducees had the power to arrest the apostles and keep them in jail, not so the gospel. The gospel cannot be bound! We read in verse 4, "But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand."

Five thousand was the current running total of those who believed in Christ. That included the three thousand that were saved on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). That also included the number of those who were being saved "day by day" (Acts 2:47). The text here is specific. It says that the number "of the men" who believed came to be about five thousand. In other words, this doesn't include the women and children. So, we are talking some 10,000-20,000 people in Jerusalem who were followers of Christ. This is a far cry from the 120 that gathered initially after Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:15). That's why this is such an exciting book! Because the church exploded in the early days. We get to watch it happen in our study here at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Well, continuing on, we see that "A Bold Witness" ...

2. Preaches Christ (verses 5-12)

In fact, this is the essence of what it means to be bold. It means speaking the truth, even when others don't want to hear it. That's exactly what Peter does. Verses 5-7 set the scene.

Acts 4:5-7

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

Now, just a few months before, this same scene took place. Only then, it was Jesus, who was brought into the courtroom to face a mock trial. It was before the same people. It was in the same place. When Jesus stood trial, it was before these very men, Annas and Caiaphas. These were the men in power during the days of Jesus. Annas had been high priest for nine years (from 6-15 A. D.). Caiaphas, his son-in-law, held his office for 18 years (from 18-36 A.D.). Truth be told, Annas was "the real power behind the throne."^[2] We are talking nearly thirty years of power was held by this family. We know nothing about John and Alexander, except what is mentioned here in verse 6. Apparently, they were a part of the high-priestly clan.

So Peter and John were before these men. It wasn't only these men who were there. There was the entire council as well (mentioned in verse 15). That's seventy men. Peter and John (and the lame man, verse 14), stood in the middle of the semi-circle, looking up to all of these men.

Amazingly, the questions covered the same issue as in the days of Jesus. It was a question of authority. They inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). "This" is a reference to the healing of the lame man.

It's no accident that they were concerned with authority. This is where their main concern was with Jesus. The ministry of Jesus hit squarely at the power and authority of the religious leaders. They were concerned that Jesus was gathering followers after himself. See, if the people followed after Jesus, they wouldn't follow after them. And their entire religious system would fall. This is why they questioned Jesus about authority. There was a day when Jesus was "teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel" (Luke 20:1) that ...

Luke 20:1-2

Luke 20:1 the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority?"

Now, standing before this very counsel, the same questions were asked. Surely, this all was not lost on Peter. John Stott says, ...

Memories of the trial of Jesus must have flooded the apostles' minds. Was history to repeat itself? They could hardly expect justice from that court, which had listened to false witnesses and unjustly condemned their Lord. Were they to suffer the same fate? Would they too be handed over to the Romans and crucified? They must have asked themselves such questions.

Only, during the trial of Jesus, Peter was cowering in fear, not willing to enter into the courtroom area. Peter was not even willing to confess that he was a follower of Jesus. Do you remember when he was outside the courtroom, looking in and warming himself by the fire? Others around the fire heard his Galilean dialect, and asked him if he was with Jesus. Peter denied it all. His denial before the servant girl says it all. He said to her, "Woman, I do not know him" (Luke 22:57).

Oh, but how times have changed. Rather than being cowardly and fearful, Peter is going to take the offensive. He will begin to attack his accusers of their own sin, in rejecting their Messiah! They rejected the living one, by whose very power this lame man was healed.

And what made the difference? Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (verse 8). This doesn't refer to Pentecost, as if the filling of Peter was the power at this moment. No, this is a fresh filling of the Spirit, empowering for the moment to speak with particular boldness. We will see this on several other times in the book of Acts. When the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit just before speaking boldly. (See Acts 7:55; 13:9). It's only right for us to seek for this filling every time we have an event that brings with it an open door for the gospel. When there is an open door, open your mouth, praying, "Lord, give me the words to say at this moment as I open my mouth to speak?"

Jesus promised to answer such a prayer. Do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples?

Luke 21:12-15

They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, or I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

And at this moment, Peter speaks the words that the Holy Spirit gave to him. They weren't prepared beforehand. They weren't some canned speech. They were the words of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 4:8-12

"Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

End everyone in the room took notice of his boldness. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Peter was a changed man! No longer was he the fearful coward, denying that he knew Jesus. Rather, Peter was the one who was willing to stand against these men in the face of death, and be a witness for Jesus.

Oh, may the Lord give such boldness to all of us.

The rulers had asked Peter a question about the power he had to heal the lame man. The answer was so simple. Those who had witnessed the miracle could easily have answered this question. Because, Peter said at that moment of the healing, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). This is Peter's answer. It was the name of Jesus Christ that gave him the power.

It was so simple for Peter, then, to pivot to speak about Jesus. Just like the question asked of me, "What is your occupation that makes you so strong?" Peter's answer comes in verse 10, "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, ... this man is standing before you well."

However, just mentioning the name of Jesus wasn't enough for Peter. He had to make it clear that this Jesus is the same one who stood before them a few months earlier. They were hostile towards him, putting him to death. But the one whom they put to death is the very one who gave life to this lame man. Peter says here in verse 9 that "this man has been healed." Literally, it reads in the Greek, "this man has been saved." That is, he has been rescued out of a life of poverty and begging to live a new life. I would suspect that this man trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, especially as he was standing right with Peter and John during the trial.

Further, Peter can't leave the topic without mentioning the resurrection. When mentioning Jesus, Peter says, "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10). Remember, this is one of the reasons why Peter was standing before the council in the first place. He and John were "... proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2).

Peter makes it crystal clear that Jesus was, indeed, risen from the dead. The verification of the fact, was the lame man who was healed. Dead people can't heal others. But Jesus is alive and well and powerful enough to give this man "perfect health" (Acts 3:16).

But Peter doesn't stop there. He presses on to speak of the reality of Jesus. He says, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). This is a quote from Psalm 118, which the Jews in the council would have known well. It was the Psalm that the crowds shouted on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem, humble and on a donkey.

Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9; Psalm 118:25-26).

Just a few verses before, David writes in Psalm 118, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Psalm 118:22). Peter claims that Jesus is the stone! The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus. But risen from the dead, Jesus became the "cornerstone." That is, the most important, foundational stone of the building.

This wasn't the first time that these leaders heard this message. When they questioned Jesus about his authority to teach and preach (Luke 20:2), he told them a parable about the wicked tenants.

Luke 20:9-18

"A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone?"

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

This is exactly the point that Peter is making to the council. God sent his prophets to the people, but they rejected them and mistreated them. Over and over they did this evil. So God sent his son. And they killed him! But that wasn't the end of it all. The one they killed is actually the foundation stone of the whole house. Jesus is the cornerstone! He is the Savior! Peter makes this point in verse 12, ...

Acts 4:12

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This verse is very interesting. When we hear this verse, we hear it talk about the exclusivity of Jesus. We hear the words of Jesus in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." We hear how Jesus is the only way to God.

That's not wrong. It's right to think this. But the original hearers didn't hear "exclusivity." They heard, "divinity." In other words, the Jews had a Savior. It was the LORD. It was Yahweh. It was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Consider Isaiah 43:3, ...

Isaiah 43:3

For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

And their Savior was exclusive.

Isaiah 43:11

I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.

So, when Peter says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," he is claiming that Jesus is the exclusive Savior that the Jews professed! "Jesus is the Lord! Jesus is God! He is the one you need to seek for your salvation."

It is true for us today as well. Indeed, there is no Savior besides Jesus. Now, we live in a society that debates this. People think that there are many ways to God, as if we can tread our own path to heaven. People in our day will look to whatever religion or philosophy suits them, and follow after it as their way to God.

But this is not what the Bible teaches. It teaches that the only way of salvation is through Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins! Salvation doesn't come through Mohamed or Buddha or the latest Zen guru. It comes through Jesus.

Brett Kunkle said it well, ...

Why is Jesus the only way? We are conditioned by our culture to think of religion as a personal preference. We are told, "You've got yours, I've got mine and there's no right one." So, to claim Jesus is the only way to God is like claiming chocolate ice cream is the one true flavor. It sounds absurd. However, preference is the wrong category for religious truth, ice cream the wrong analogy.

Instead, we ought to think of religion the way we think of medicine. Each religion recognizes the world is sick and offers its own diagnosis, just as a doctor would. In addition, each religion offers a potential cure. And we don't choose medicine like we choose dessert. It would be absurd to say, "Doctor, I prefer aspirin over chemotherapy." Instead, we want to know what's true. Which cure actually works. When you examine the diagnosis and cures offered by other religions, you discover they differ radically from Christianity.[\[4\]](#)

This is why there is salvation only in the name of Jesus. Because all of the other world religions have differing solutions to the cure of our sin problem. Most often the medicine of the world religions is about your moral goodness, how good you are. Some religions think if you are good enough, you will come back in a higher life form. Others think if you are good enough, it will outweigh your bad, so that you are able to enter heaven. This is how most people put it

But Christianity is totally different. It is not a matter of how good you are or the good you have done. It's a matter of how your sins will be forgiven. That's why my common response to those who ask how I am is that "I'm a pastor of a church. I have the privilege of telling people how their sins can be forgiven in Jesus." I say this because forgiveness and reconciliation before God is the core of our faith. And our sins are forgiven, not because of works we have done in righteousness, but forgiven through faith and trust in Jesus.

God is righteous. We in our sin have caused God to be angry with us due to our sin. God's wrath is upon us. Nothing keeps us from being

destroyed today, except the mercy of God. It is the kindness of God that keeps us from being destroyed today. Consider Genesis 7, which tells of the flood that came upon the earth. God looks upon the wickedness of man and says, "I will destroy them all." He showed mercy to Noah and his family. That's how they were saved.

Nothing but the mercy of God (and his promise never to destroy the earth again with water) keeps us from being destroyed as they were. We are in trouble. And we can't get out of this trouble by being good enough. We have already done enough for our condemnation. We need saving. Jesus died on the cross, that he might take our punishment for us. We need to believe in him and trust in him.

There may be some of you who need to believe these things. Getting to God is not a matter of preference, choosing the way that you want to go. No, God has revealed in his word that the only name through which you can be saved is the name of Jesus. To escape our sin, we must be saved through Jesus.

This is the peril we are all in: we are lost apart from Jesus. So let's trust in him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 3, 2021 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] John Stott, Acts, p. 96 (quoting Neil).

[2] Expositor's Bible Commentary, Richard Longenecker, p. 302.

[3] John Stott, Acts, p. 96.

[4] Brett Kunkle, "Is Jesus the Only Way?" (<https://www.str.org/w/is-jesus-the-only-way->).