

ACTS 4

Again, the emphasis is chapters 3 and 4 is on the name of the Lord Jesus: twice in Acts 3 (vs. 3 and 16) but 6 times in Acts chapter 4 (vs. 7, 10, 12, 17, 18, and 30). The name of Jesus has all authority associated with it as Jesus said in Matthew 28:18. Additionally, chapter 4 records the first persecution of the early church that Jesus had already warned His followers would occur in Luke 21:12-15. In this section of the Book of the Acts we can glean 7 practical and Biblical truths that should encourage all of us in our witnessing for Christ.

1. God is long-suffering with the unsaved. The leaders of Israel had rejected the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 21:23-27) and the ministry of Jesus, and yet God gave them another opportunity to repent and be saved. They had denied and slain their own Messiah, and yet God patiently held back His judgment and sent His Spirit to deal with them. God's people today need patience as we witness to an unsaved sinful world.
2. True witness involves the "bad news" of sin and guilt as well as the "good news of hope and salvation through faith in Jesus the Christ alone. There can be no true faith in Jesus unless there is repentance from sin. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict lost sinners (John 16:7-11), and He will do this if we faithfully witness and use God's Word in love.
3. The way to reach the masses is by helping the individual sinner. Peter and John won the crippled beggar and his transformed life led to the conversion of 2,000 men. The servant of God who has no time for personal work with sinners will not be given many opportunities for ministering to great crowds. Like Jesus, the Apostles took time for individuals.
4. The best defense of the truth of the Christian faith is a changed life. The healed beggar was "Exhibit A" in Peter's defense of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. This is why we pray for and strive to minister to the hardened sinners because when they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, their changed-transformed life can be an example to many others of the power of God and to prove to them they are not too far removed from God's grace and mercy. The best proof God is not dead but surely alive is a transformed life.

5. **Whenever God blesses (especially in a public way), Satan is guaranteed to show up to oppose the work and silence the witness.** He will often times use “religious people” to do his work. The same crowd that opposed the ministry of Jesus also opposed the work of the Apostles, and they will oppose our ministries today. Expect it; but don’t let it discourage or stop you. The important thing is not that we are comfortable, but that the name of Jesus be glorified through the preaching of the whole counsel of God.
6. **God has promised to bless and use His Word (Isaiah 55:11), so let’s be faithful to witness.** Jesus even prayed that our witness would have success (John 17:20), so we have every reason to be encouraged. There is power in the name of Jesus, so we need not fear to witness and call sinners to repent.
7. **The name of Jesus STILL has power.** While we may not perform the same apostolic miracles today that were seen in the early church (people are not going to get saved walking pass your shadow like with Peter in Acts 5:15-16), but we can still claim the authority of Jesus as He has instructed us in His word. Healing is a spiritual gift; but not everyone has that gift; and those who have it can use it only at the Holy Spirit’s prompting and leading.

Peter and John Arrested and Address the Sanhedrin (vs. 1-12)

Vs. 1-2 - The *captain of the temple* refers to the police force of the temple precincts. The captain, together with the priests and the Sadducees, all came together to arrest Peter and John. The Sadducees believed only in the Pentateuch – the 4 books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)...they did not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ (and many theologians would add; that is why they are “sad-u see.”) Now the Sadducees were a small yet powerful and financially sufficient religious group

who had close ties to the Romans. They phrase “*came upon them*” emphasizes they stopped and seized Peter and John suddenly. They must have said, ‘Enough of this,’ grabbed them, and take them away. There were two things that disturbed the Sadducees and the priests about Peter, John and the disciples: (1) they taught the people and (2) preached in Jesus, the resurrection from the dead. Peter and John’s teaching refuted their fundamental beliefs thus this threatened their authority as religious teachers.

Vs. 3-6 - Normally, this would be an intimidating experience for Peter and John. Suddenly arrested, greatly disturbed officials, handled roughly (laid hands on them), threats made against them (**Acts 4:21** implies this), thrown into jail. The entire atmosphere was intended to make them afraid. (Get a volunteer to read **Matthew 10:16-20**. Not often will sharing the Gospel send us to jail in our day and age; but a day may be coming whereby teaching the LGBTQ lifestyle is sin and those practicing that lifestyle need to repent of their sin and be converted may cause the church to lose our tax-free status; violence could come against the church/pastors. What do you risk in witnessing – rejection, called names, persecution? Whatever the risks, we must realize that nothing done for God is ever wasted. It will work out for our good and His glory if we are led by the Holy Spirit to do something. And according to **vs. 1-6** no less than 11 different groups and/or individuals

opposed the disciples. **Groups: Priests and the Sadducees (Acts 4:1); Rulers, elders, scribes (Acts 4:5); and others from the family of the high priest (Acts 4:6). Individuals: The captain of the temple (Acts 4:1); Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander (Acts 4:6).** “They were declaring: We have the power. If you are allowed to preach, as you have been preaching, it is because we have permitted you to do it... Anytime we want, we can arrest you and carry you off to jail. But despite the opposition coming against the gospel, the number of Christians kept increasing, growing to 5,000 from 3,000 at last count (Acts 2:41). Notice the early church did not have the advantages that some ministries boast of today. They did not have big buildings and budgets from wealthy donors. Their pastors lacked credentials from accredited seminaries, nor did they have the endorsement of political and influential entertainers of that day. Most of the early church ministers had jail records and probably would have a hard time getting an interview let alone a pastor’s job today. But the believers of the early church knew how to pray so that God’s hand could work in mighty power and they taught in the power of the Holy Spirit “the entire Gospel.” Opposition did not slow the church down at all. Every time God allowed persecution to come to the church in the N.T. the church grew.

Vs. 7 – Since the lame man’s healing was an indisputable fact (3:1-10) the rulers asked by what power or by what name was this done. The Jewish rulers were more interested in protecting their reputations and positions than in God.

Vs. 8-10 – Peter spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit. Note that Peter was again filled with the Spirit (see **Acts 2:4**) and would experience another filling before the day ended (**Acts 4:31**). There is one baptism of the Spirit, and that is at conversion (**1 Corinthians 12:13**), but there must be many fillings of the Spirit if the believer is to be an effective witness for Jesus (**Ephesians 5:18**). In **vs. 9** the tone of Peter’s reply shows that he was not intimidated by this court, though humanly speaking, he should have been intimidated by the same court that sent Jesus to crucifixion. But Peter was emboldened by the Holy Spirit and he was logical; Peter’s logic was piercing – he says why are we on trial for a good deed? Remember Jesus had promised His disciples that they would stand before kings and rulers and that the Spirit of God within them would implant in their minds exactly what to say to these leaders (**Matthew 10:16-20**).

Vs. 11 – The O.T. refers to the cornerstone as the foundation of the earth (**Job 38:6**); as the foundation in **Isaiah 28:16**; and the chief cornerstone in **Psalms 118:22**. Therefore, Peter using this phrase to point out that when the people

rejected Jesus, they rejected the One who completed the plan of God for humanity. Peter made it clear that the council were “the builders” and that they had rejected God’s Stone – Jesus, the Son of God. The Jews stumbled over the “Rock” (**Romans 9:32 and 1 Corinthians 1:23**) just as it was prophesied.

Vs. 12 – It is this type of statement in Scripture that the unsaved world hates; other religions hate. It is this statement that highlights what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13-14 and John 14:6** (volunteer reader read). Peter didn’t merely proclaim Jesus as *a way of salvation*, but as *the only way of salvation*. The idea that there is no salvation in any other, and that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved is hard to accept for many, but it is exactly what Jesus said. Believers should be open minded on non-salvation issues but the method and means of salvation is not open to negotiation because God has ordained “One Way.” Only by placing faith in Jesus can one be saved period.

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (vs. 13-22)

Vs. 13 – Knowing that Peter and John were uneducated Galilean fishermen, the council was amazed at what being with Jesus had done for them. Peter and John spoke with confidence and freedom and their presentation of the

Gospel was powerful *because they had the anointing of the Holy Spirit leading and directing them* and they had their personal witness of everything they spoke about. How do we know Jesus is real? We have Biblical evidence, prophecies fulfilled with specificity, but the greatest evidence Jesus is real is a person's testimony of a transformed life that can be heard and seen via lifestyle. A changed life convinces people of Christ's power. Since you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior there should be a marked difference in your attitude and lifestyle.

Vs. 14 – Regarding the phrase *they could say nothing against it* - it is interesting to note what the Jewish leaders *did not do*: they did not make any attempt to disprove the resurrection of Jesus. If it were possible to do, this was the time to do it; yet they could not. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin had seized the opportunity! And if they had succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed.

Vs. 15-18 - Although the evidence was overwhelming and irrefutable (changed lives and a healed man), the religious leaders refused to believe in Christ and continued to try to suppress the truth (read **Romans 1:18-24**). The Sanhedrin engaged in what we'd call today – “damage control.” In **vs. 16** regarding the phrase, “*So that it spreads no further among the people*” - The Sanhedrin's fear

of the preaching of Jesus was rooted in their own sinful self-interest, not in any desire to protect the people. Additionally, they tried to intimidate the apostles by warning them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Don't be surprised if some people reject you and your positive witness for Christ.

When minds are seared and closed to the truth of the Gospel, even the clearest presentation of the facts of the Gospel cannot open them. But also know, the Christian's job is to *plant the seed* of the Gospel and *water the seed* of the Gospel that has already been planted. The growth and fruition of the seed planted is up to God. We must not give up on people currently not saved; rather we should witness to and pray for God to open their spiritual eyes to who Jesus is.

Vs. 19 - notice the apostles recognized there is no authority apart from God.

When human authority rejects God's authority, saved people must obey God.

A very good example is the Jewish midwives during the era of Moses (*Exodus 1*) and the three Hebrew boys Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (*Daniel 3*).

Vs. 20 – Regarding the phrase “*we cannot but speak*” - Peter and John must speak of the things which they had seen and heard. They had to, not only because of the inner compulsion of the Holy Spirit, but also because of the command of Jesus from *Acts 1:8* when Jesus said, “*You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem.*” If your courage to witness for Christ has weakened, pray

that your boldness may increase. Remember Jesus' promise in **Matthew 10:32-33** - *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.*

Prayer for Boldness (vs. 21-31)

Most of the first century ministers had jail records and would probably have a hard time joining and being accepted in our churches or seminaries today, let alone being a spiritual leader in one. So what was the early church leader's secret to success? I tell you, the Christians of the early church knew how to pray so that God's hand could work mighty power in all that they did. Saint Augustine of Hippo, an early Christian theologian said, "Pray as though everything depended on God and then work as though everything depended on you."

Vs. 21-22 – Regarding the phrase "*Finding no way of punishing them, because of the people*" - the Jewish leaders were completely unmoved by an obvious miracle from God, yet they responded to public opinion. This proves they cared far more about man's opinion than God's opinion. The phrase "*they all glorified God for what had been done*" - this whole situation started out looking pretty bad. Peter and John were on trial before the same court that sent Jesus

to Pilate for crucifixion. It was meant for great evil, but when it was all over, look at what God did: 2,000 more people came to faith in Christ Jesus - Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit again - Peter got to preach Jesus to the leaders of the Jews - Hostile examiners confirmed a miraculous healing - The enemies of Jesus were confused - Peter and John were bolder for Jesus than ever before – and God was glorified.

Vs. 23-24 - Peter and John returned to the place where the church was gathered praying for their leaders. And when Peter and John told the praying church what happened, instead of them being upset and fearful...a prayer worship service broke out. ***Vs. 24a*** says they were united in this prayer worship service. When it came time for the church to meet, the first century church Christians did not have to be rounded up...no *APB* – no *All Points Bulletins* was needed to be sent out...they were no *MIA* (missing in action) reports needed to be filed. They were in their place when it came time for worship! This is God's desire for all His children as **Hebrews 10:25** states...we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves. Church, you need to be aware of this...**A faith that won't take you to church (in person or online) will not take you to Heaven either!** In **vs. 24b** notice how they prayed...they first acknowledged God...no matter what the problem, in the adoration phase of praying...when you recognize who you are talking to...when you recognize

you are talking to the one and only true and living God...the God who can do anything but fail – who has unlimited resources and unfathomable grace and mercy...you can be strengthened no matter what the issue you're facing when you realize who you are talking to.

Vs. 25-26 - in these verses they reflect the hatred of the world toward Jesus and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the sins of the world. They praised God for His gift. If there is ever a valid reason to praise the Lord, it is because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He was buried, and was resurrected so that we may have eternal life – that is a reason to praise Him like never before. Also notice they prayed back God's word in **vs. 25-26 – they recounted **Psalm 2:1-2** which describes a revolt of the nations against the Lord and His Christ...but God laughed at their revolt for He knew they could never stand against His king. Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and the Jews – enemies of Jesus ganged up to defeat Jesus and for a moment it looked like they were successful after Jesus was crucified on the cross. But that was God's plan before the foundation of the earth because on the 3rd day, after Jesus was crucified, He got up from the grave with all power in His hand. This is why they gathered to pray when Peter and John were arrested...they knew they did not have to march on the Sanhedrin Council with free Peter and John signs in hand or try and develop a prison break out plan...they knew; nothing could stand against**

God's plans nor God's called out servants...ultimate victory in the name of Jesus has already been attained. So church, when we pray...we must understand prayer and the word of God go hand in hand.

Vs. 27-28 – Saved people must always view their circumstances in light of God's Word. We must understand the "*wrath of man*" never operates outside of the sphere of God's control. These enemies of Jesus could only do whatever God allowed. This should give the Believer real peace knowing that whatever comes our way must pass through God's hand first, and God will only allow what He permits (*Job 1:9-12*). And even if God permits pain and suffering, it will work out for our eventual good and His glory. Remember what Paul said in **Philippians 1:29** – "*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*" Here the Apostles are not physically harmed, but in chapter 5 they will be physically harmed and their response is remarkable and a reflection of them understanding the essence of **Philippians 1:29**.

Vs. 29-30 - Notice they did not pray to have their circumstances changed or their enemies harmed or removed from office. Rather, they asked God to empower them to make the best use of their circumstances and to accomplish what He had already determined – they were asking for divine enablement; not escape. And this facet of the prayer in and of itself shows spiritual growth

with the disciples, remember in **Luke 9:54** a Samaritan village rejected Jesus and then disciples James and John asked Jesus if they could pray for fire to come down from heaven and consume that village. In **vs. 29** we see disciples on fire for the Lord. We must have a burning desire to make salvation through Jesus the Christ known to lifestyle sinners and the only way Salvation will be made known to lifestyle sinners is for Christians to open up our mouths and proclaim boldly - Jesus can save you no matter what condition you're in. Boldness is a key word in this text...it does not mean arrogance...it's not overconfidence but scripturally speaking...boldness is having the courage to stand up for Jesus in the face of opposition; it's speaking truth to power. In order to exercise holy boldness, you must keep close company with Jesus, and we do that primarily through the Word of God, through prayer, through worship & fasting. Holy boldness does not come from rebels, mavericks, are from people who want their way verses Jesus' way. You must be a bondservant to exhibit holy boldness.

Vs. 31 - Bold proclamation of Jesus comes after we've been filled with the Holy Spirit. God answers their prayer request for boldness by filling the people once again with His Spirit. Now this was not a "2nd Pentecost" just like there can never be a "2nd crucifixion of Jesus on the Cross" – there is one baptism of the Holy Spirit (that occurs when you are saved) but there are

many fillings affirmed by **Ephesians 5:18**. Miracles, signs, and wonders are still alive today! God has not run out of miracles – He has not run out of resources – He has not run out of power. If we pray without ceasing and take Jesus everywhere we go...the possibilities are endless to what Jesus can and will do. Regarding the phrase *“they spoke the word of God with boldness”* - their boldness was *a gift from God*, received through prayer. It was not something that they tried to work up themselves. Too often we deliberately hide the work of God in our life from others who would actually benefit from hearing about it.

United in Love for God and Love for One Another (vs. 32-37)

If we want to see a reversal of the headlong rush into sexual immorality and spiritual apathy...then the church must plug into God’s power source called prayer and we must unite in love as we engage in kingdom advancement work. The power that rested on the early church is still available to the modern church today. We merely need to plug into the same sources of power they used in that day. The early church plugged into the power source of loving God and loving one another - corporate prayer – reading/studying/obeying the word – authentic corporate worship – living out the essence of the Great Commission.

Vs. 32 – Regarding the phrase they were of **“one heart and one soul”** – the early church Christians did not live just for themselves, but they lived for those around them (I wish more unvaccinated people could understand that). The early church was consumed and engaged in the needs of other believers,

and they were significantly concerned about the needs of the unsaved people around them. They did not just pray for the people and say be warm and not give a coat to one who had a basic need. The early church possessed a servant's heart like Jesus and they were united...and because of their unity, they regarded people more important than programs/projects/initiatives. Now regarding unity **Proverbs 6:19** tells us God calls it an abomination to sow seeds of discord among the brethren. Luke highlights the unity the early church was experiencing was not conformity, whereby everybody is exactly alike. We don't have the same spiritual gifts hence, we are not all called to the same ministry. And this also means we are to serve in the areas of our spiritual gifting. Regarding the phrase "*all things in common*" – the early church recognized God's ownership of everything. **Psalm 24:1** says - *the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.*" It all belongs to God. And for the early church, because God had touched their lives so deeply, they found it easy to share all things in common. The phrase "*all things in common*" also refers to the Greek word "Koinonia" which simply means *Christian fellowship that includes participating and sharing in a common Biblical commitment and spiritual community*. Jesus said in **John 13:35** - *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Vs. 33 – The early church carried the message of the Gospel to a world that desperately needed that message...and this is just as important and needed for the modern day church today. When we preach "the Gospel" the favor of God will be upon us. And what is the Gospel? **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** which says, *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."* It is critically important that we know human words cannot change human hearts...only the word of God can...only the Gospel has the power to transform lives.

Vs. 34-35 – Regarding the phrase *"All who were possessors of lands or houses sold them"* – this verse is not suggesting socialism or communism. This radical giving was absolutely necessary to meet the needs of this rapidly growing church. Remember, many of these Jerusalem Christians lived as refugees from abroad, having responded to the gospel during Pentecost. Regarding the phrase *"all who were possessors of lands"* – the people didn't wait for others to give. When a need arose, they gave what they had to help others. They distributed to each as anyone had need. But unfortunately, this generosity of the early Christians soon began to be abused; like it is in today's era. The Apostle Paul provides teaching on how the church should assess the needs of those seeking help from the church. Paul taught:

- The church must discern who the truly needy are (*1 Timothy 5:3*).
- If one can work to support himself, he is not truly needy and must provide for his own needs (*2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:11*).
- If family can support a needy person, the church should not support them (*1 Timothy 5:3-4*).
- Those who are supported by the church must make some return to the church body (*1 Timothy 5:5, 10*).
- It is right for the church to examine moral conduct before giving support (*1 Timothy 5:9-13*).
- The support of the church should be for the most basic necessities of living (*1 Timothy 6:8*).

Vs. 36-37 - In essence Barnabas was the first “*minister of encouragement*” in the New Testament. I believe *every Christian need 3 types of people in their life* to best fulfill God’s mission and purpose for your life. I believe everybody need a “*Paul*” in their life – someone who is spiritually mature who can help you understand the Scriptures and like Paul did to Peter when it was necessary, a Paul will tell you “in love” the truth and how they really feel about something. I believe everybody need a “*Timothy*” in their life - someone you are pouring into spiritually what God is pouring into you. And then everyone need someone like the man in our text - a “*Barnabus*” - an encourager. When the pain and suffering from this mean, cruel world makes you think you’re never going to stop crying – you need a Barnabus to remind you - weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (not necessarily “am”...but in due season). Now don’t miss this fact about Barnabas in our text...*Barnabus put his money where his mouth was*. In **vs. 37**

it says, *“Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”* Barnabas, being the encourager that he was, took a valuable piece of property, sold it, and gave it to the apostles to help meet the needs of the people. An encourager sees a need, and then says, “I will give what I can, and/or I will do what I can, to meet that need.” *Now don't get the wrong idea that you have to have money to be an encourager.* You may not be financially stable or able to help people materially/financially, but all Believers can be an encourager. A *sick person’s* primary need is not money; they need someone to pray with and for them and they need to be reminded our God is Jehovah Rapha – the Lord who heals...A *lonely person’s* primary need is not money; they just need a few minutes of your time; a listening ear and a non-judgmental heart. A *discouraged person’s* primary need is not money; they just need someone reminding them there is hope in Jesus...they need someone to share a testimony of how God delivered them. This paragraph of scripture *(vs. 32-37)* highlights the church must be united in love for God and united in love for one another.