

BOLDNESS

Text: Acts 4:1-31

Introduction:

1. The context: Peter and John have just healed the blind man at the gate of the temple called Beautiful. Peter seizes the opportunity to preach Christ to the crowd that gathered.
2. Boldness is a key theme of this passage and is mentioned three times (Vs. 13, 29, 31). Boldness is what we need if we are to be an effective witness for Christ. Boldness is what you are going to need when you are faced this week with REAL witnessing challenges.
3. What is boldness?
 - It is not brashness. To be brash is to be impertinent, tactless and rude. Brashness is a fruit of the flesh, boldness a fruit of the Spirit.
 - It is courage to speak in the face of adversity. It is freedom in speaking. Vincent notes that the word literally means “with freedom”; a compound word made up of ‘all’ and ‘speech’; so speaking everything, and therefore without reserve. A.T. Robertson defines it as “telling it all”, Strong’s as “all out spokenness”. A simple dictionary definition of the English word is “not hesitating or fearful in the face of actual or possible danger or rebuff; courageous and daring.”
4. In this message we will consider this theme of boldness as exemplified in the lives of Peter and John as they faced significant opposition to their witness for Christ. We will divide the passage into four parts for this sermon.

Observe firstly...

I. THE OCCASION OF THEIR BOLDNESS (VS. 1-7)

A. The Preaching of Peter and John (Vs. 1-2)

1. Their preaching of the Christ and the Gospel message aroused the hostility and opposition of the religious leaders. They were ‘grieved’. The word means “to be worked up, indignant” (Robertson); it means to “be vexed through and through” (Vincent). Satan hates the Gospel! Leave the Gospel out and he will leave you alone. Preach the Gospel and expect vicious opposition.
2. Three categories are mentioned:
 - a. The priests of the temple.
 - b. The temple captain.
 - c. The Sadducees.
 - d. The temple was controlled and dominated by the Sadducean party. They were theological liberals, denying the truth of resurrection and other key doctrines.
3. Religion has ever been in opposition to the truth of the Gospel. The liberal crowd is particularly hostile to the truths of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

4. Not all rejoice when a life is transformed by the power of God. In reality, they would have selfishly preferred that this man had been left in his desperate condition.

B. The Persecution of Peter and John (Vs. 3-7)

Peter and John were subjected to...

1. Imprisonment (Vs. 3-4)
 - a. The Messengers were bound (Vs. 3).
 - b. The Message was not bound (Vs. 4). The Gospel is an unstoppable message and the Bible an unstoppable Book. Countless attempts of Satan down through the centuries to extinguish the light of God's truth have failed and God's truth marches on. 2 Tim. 2:9 "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds; **but the word of God is not bound.**" The most powerful thing in this world is not the atomic bomb, it is the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - c. Illustration: The time I lit a fire and the more I tried to put it out the more it spread.
2. Interrogation (Vs. 5-7)
 - a. The Gathering of the Sanhedrin (Vs. 5-6)
 - b. The Question of the Sanhedrin (Vs. 7)
 - c. "set them in the midst" = implies that the judges were seated in a semicircle so that they could see one another, as the Jewish tradition states. (Custer)
 - d. John Phillips writes, "Everything in their surroundings should have overawed these two peasants. They were standing in the impressive surroundings of the nation's supreme court, facing the nation's richest, ablest, most aristocratic, educated, and powerful men. There were a couple of country bumpkins who should have stood there mumbling apologetically, with shuffling feet and downcast eyes. Instead they looked more like what they really were, ambassadors from the courts of heaven. They stood as those who had an ultimatum to present – surrender or war."
 - e. Imagine Peter and John standing before this court. Remember, this same council was the same council that had condemned Christ to death on the cross only weeks before this. These men had proven themselves to be willing to violate every principle of justice in order to try and stamp out this new movement of the one called Jesus of Nazareth. They were murderous and unrepentant men.
 - f. How are you going to stand and speak the truth when faced with significant opposition and hostility? We need boldness.

Observe secondly...

II. THE DECLARATION OF THEIR BOLDNESS (VS. 8-12)

A. The Source of Peter's Boldness (Vs. 8)

1. The reality of the Spirit's filling (Vs. 8a)
 - a. As believers we experience one indwelling at salvation.
 - b. As believers we need repeated fillings for service.
2. The result of the Spirit's filling (Vs. 8b)
 - a. The fruit of Spirit's filling was that Peter had the ability to speak plainly for Christ in the face of opposition. What a contrast we see in Peter. Just a few weeks earlier, when questioned by a damsel (young girl) he had cowered in fear and denied Christ.
 - b. What changed Peter? There are several key events that had taken place in Peter's life recently:
 - i. The collapse of Peter's self-life. Peter was naturally outspoken; it was one of the strengths of his personality. If we had known Peter, he would have been the last person we would have suspected of being likely to deny Christ in the face of opposition. But the Lord had to humble Peter and break him so that he would learn that God's work is not accomplished through force of personality and natural gifts but by the life of Christ working through him.
 - ii. The resurrection of Christ. The fact that Christ was alive filled the Apostles with unwavering courage even unto death.
 - iii. The coming of the Holy Spirit. Christ had been with His disciples but now He would be in them in the Person of the Holy Spirit and would empower and enable them for the task.
 - iv. Challenge: A failure to speak for Christ in the past does not have to be the end of the story. Peter and the other disciples are a wonderful example of what God can do with Christians who have failed in the past.
 - c. A brief study of the references in the New Testament to the filling of the Spirit will demonstrate that this is one of the primary evidences of the Spirit's filling. For example:
 - i. Elizabeth – "...and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice..." (Luke 1:41-45)
 - ii. Zacharias – "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied saying," (Luke 1:67)
 - iii. Peter – Acts 4:8
 - iv. Jerusalem church – Acts 4:31
 - v. Paul – Acts 13:9-12

B. The Sermon of Peter's Boldness (Vs. 9-12)

Peter boldly declared several truths in his defence before the Jewish Sanhedrin. He boldly declared...

1. The Saving Power of Christ (Vs. 9-10)

- a. Vs. 14 reveals the man who was healed was standing with Peter and John.
 - b. What a powerful form of evidence! Peter simply pointed to the man standing before them and testified to the reality of what Christ had done. This man who had been lame from birth now stood and walked!
2. Their Sin towards Christ (Vs. 10b-11)
- It takes Holy Spirit boldness and courage to preach plainly against sin. Peter charges them with...
- a. The murder of Christ – “whom ye crucified” (10b)
 - b. The misplacing of the stone (11). Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22.
3. The Salvation in Christ (Vs. 12)
- a. “none other name” = “a name had great meaning in the ancient world. It was not just a sound or title for a person; it denoted the person himself. It also denoted the authority of a person.” (Custer)
 - b. This is one of the most powerful Gospel texts in the New Testament. Peter has just declared the truths of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection and now he boldly proclaims Christ as the **only** way of salvation.
 - c. The truth of the Gospel is clear, salvation is only found in Christ (John 14:6). Many roads do NOT lead to heaven. The many roads of men are all a part of the broad way that leads to hell. There is only one way to heaven and that is Christ, the narrow way.

III. THE REACTION TO THEIR BOLDNESS (VS. 13-22)

A. The Realization of the Council (Vs. 13-14)

Note the words ‘saw...perceived...took knowledge’. Several things forcibly dawned on the Sanhedrin. They discerned...

- 1. Their boldness (Vs. 13a). “The greatest courage is always displayed when men stand for Jesus Christ.” (Butler) Living the Christian life requires far more courage than following the crowd of sinful men.
- 2. Their qualifications (Vs. 13b). They had not been trained in the proper Rabbinic schools. The word ‘ignorant’ means ‘untrained’.
- 3. Their associations (Vs. 13c). They discerned by the boldness of Peter and John that they had been keeping company with the Lord Jesus.
 - i. “People can tell where you have been, whom you have been with, and what you are...If you have the real thig, people will know. It will show in your manners, your dress, your attitude, your speech, your work, and in many other ways.” (Butler)

- ii. “They could see the evidence of their association with Christ in the firmness of their faces, in their boldness and bravery in standing against the people who crucified the Saviour.” (Ironsides)
- iii. Principle: The more we spend time with Christ in prayer and the Word, the more people will be able to discern that we have been with Jesus. Our lives and lips will reveal it.

B. The Deliberations of the Council (Vs. 15-22)

The primary question considered by the council was “What shall we do with these men?” (Vs. 16)

1. The Conclusions of the Council (Vs. 15-17).
 - a. The miracle was real and they could not deny it (Vs. 15-16).
 - b. The only thing they could do was to attempt to silence the messengers by threatening them (Vs. 17).
 - c. What a window into the unrepentant heart! Instead of responding to the truth in repentance, they seek to suppress it with intimidation and threats.
 - d. The world will try and intimidate you into silence if you seek to be a witness.
2. The Command of the Council (Vs. 18-20, 21)
 - a. The restrictions of their command (Vs. 18, 21). The command was clear. They were not to speak **at all** in the name of Christ.
 - b. The response to their command (Vs. 19-20).
 - i. This was obedient disobedience on the part of Peter and John. An unlawful command had been issued by the religious authorities which had to be disobeyed.
 - ii. Acts 5:29 – We ought to obey God rather than man.
 - iii. MacLaren writes, “The limits of civil obedience are clearly drawn. It is a duty, because ‘the powers that be are ordained of God,’ and obedience to them is obedience to Him. But if they, transcending their sphere, claim obedience which can only be rendered by disobedience to Him who has appointed them, then they are no longer His ministers, and the duty of allegiance falls away.”

IV. THE SUPPLICATION FOR MORE BOLDNESS (VS. 23-31)

The response of the disciples to the threatening’s of the enemies of the truth was to pray for more boldness to continue to stand and speak. Note several truths about this prayer for boldness:

A. The Partnership of their Praying (Vs. 23-24a)

1. “they went to their own company” = the first thing Peter and John did was seek out the fellowship of the local church. When you are being persecuted for your faith, there is nothing sweeter than to be with God’s people who can help shoulder the burden in prayer for

you. Don't stay away from church when you are discouraged by opposition!

2. "they lifted up their voices to God with one accord" = when the pressure of persecution came upon this church, they didn't divide and scatter. They united in the place of prayer. Opposition to the truth should unite the local church body in the place of prayer.
3. J. Anderson: "Unity is half the conquest of the battle when a great venture is under way. No wonder Satan was anxious to undermine this unity and as soon as possible, and that from within (5:3)."

B. The Points of their Praying (Vs. 24b-30)

1. Adoration (Vs. 24b-28)
 - a. God is the Creator (Vs. 24b)
 - b. God is the Revealer (Vs. 25-26). They were able to make sense of what was happening with the help of the Word of God.
 - c. God is the Ruler (Vs. 27-28)
2. Petition (Vs. 29-30)
 - a. They asked for more boldness (Vs. 29)
 - b. They asked for more miracles (Vs. 30)

C. The Power of their Praying (Vs. 31)

- a. The place was shaken (Vs. 31a)
- b. The people were filled (Vs. 31b). In Vs. 8, Peter was filled as an individual but here we have the whole church filled with the Spirit! Imagine the power of a church where every member is filled with the Holy Ghost.
 - i. Custer: "Their prayer produced an earthquake of power. They were not to 'coast' on the experience of Pentecost. The Spirit showing that He would fill them again and again as the needs arise – just as He still does today (Eph. 5:18)."
 - ii. Filling means being empty of self and sin.
 - iii. Filling means yielding control of my life to the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Will you ask God for Holy Ghost boldness to be a witness for Him?