

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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Acts 4:1-22 (read vv.1-13) “A Transformed Life”

Intro. From chapter 3 of Acts we learned that through the power of Jesus Christ, Peter and John were instrumental in healing a man who was born lame. Needless to say, the excitement of the miracle attracted a large crowd. There must have been thousands of people gathered together in the temple courts after hearing about this miracle. So Peter took advantage of the opportunity and preached a powerful message of salvation in Christ. In v.4 of our text we read that the number of believing men in the early church had grown to 5,000, not including women and children. Much of this tremendous growth was a direct result of this miracle and Peter’s message.

Well, the leaders who had crucified Jesus had enough of this. They were tired of the apostles preaching about Jesus and His resurrection. The Sadducees especially got upset because they did not believe in the resurrection (v.2), and they were being proved wrong. The Pharisees got upset because they were largely responsible for the crucifixion. They decided that they had to put a stop to the preaching about Jesus. So in v.3 we read that Peter and John were arrested and put in custody. So chapter 4 marks the beginning of persecution against the Church.

Now the apostles had been prepared for persecution. Jesus had predicted that His followers would be delivered up to councils (Mk. 13:9). In Jn. 15:20 He told them, “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

But even though the apostles were prepared for this confrontation, the rulers were not prepared for what they were going to deal with. Just a few months prior to this, the apostles were cowardly and fearful of the rulers. But now, things were different. Peter and John had undergone a dramatic transformation. Whereas before Peter would have said, “What a powerful and fearful court!”; now he stands before them and thinks, “What a great and influential congregation!” So instead of stopping Peter from preaching, their enemies got a powerful sermon instead! Clearly something was different about these men. They were obviously transformed. And that is the subject I want to focus on today.

Now the Bible teaches that a Christian can and does experience a transformed life. In Rom. 12:2 Paul said, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....” The Greek word translated “transformed” is *metamorpho*. We get our word “metamorphosis” from this word.

You know that is what happens to a caterpillar. They will eat and eat. Then, at the right time they will spin themselves into a cocoon. Then after a few weeks they will break out of the cocoon and fly away as a beautiful butterfly. What a transformation from an ugly caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. Even so, God can transform your life as we shall see today.

Do you realize that we all need a spiritual metamorphosis? We know that we are not what we ought to be. We know we need a change. And how many times have you tried to change for the better and failed? You keep committing the same sins over and over again. Well I have good news for you. We can experience a great change in our life. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” This transformation is not just for preachers and other leaders of the church. This is something we all need. So to help each of us to be transformed into what we ought to be, notice with me what you should do first:

I. RECOGNIZE THE MEANS OF TRANSFORMATION

Of course, the first step in experiencing a spiritual transformation of life is to be born again, as Jesus stated in John 3. There He said, “You must be born again.” There He is talking about an inward change that leads to a change of life. How, then, are we born again? Well as we saw from chapter 3, you must first repent of your sins and be converted to faith in Christ. But after that vital first step, our text gives 3 means God uses to transform you into the person God wants you to be. First, we are transformed by:

A. The Word of Jesus Christ – I believe that the Word of God is very important in transforming lives. We see this truth in the last of v.13, which gives the secret of Peter’s transformation. There we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” At first they could not figure out how such common men without a formal rabbinical education could speak so well and so knowledgeably. Then, “they realized that they had been with Jesus.” They were reminded how they had been influenced by Jesus, who also “taught ... as one who had authority” (Mark 1:22). Peter and the other apostles spent 3 years hearing the words of Jesus. They were trained by the best teacher and with the best content, the Word of God. Jesus opened their understanding of the Old Testament like no other person could. Their training was better than any seminary education.

So one way God transforms our lives is by the Word of God. Romans 12:2 tells us we are transformed “by the renewing of our minds.” Eph. 4:23 says “...that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” So if we are going to have a change of life we must also have a change of mind.

Our minds have many similarities to a computer. A computer can do some great things, but it must have a good program, and it must take in the right information. But on the other hand, there is a saying, “Garbage in, garbage out.” In like manner we should not fill our minds with the garbage of Satan and of the world. Instead we should fill our minds with the Word of Jesus Christ, and that will result in spiritual transformation.

So we need to spend time in the Word of God, letting its truths transform the way we think. There is no substitute for the Word of God. How much time do you spend each week hearing and reading God’s Word? The more time you spend in prayer and reading God’s Word, the more you will be transformed.

The second way they were changed so dramatically was by:

B. The Resurrection of Christ – The apostles believed that Jesus was alive, and they were excited about it. In v.10 Peter once again preaches the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, it wasn’t until the resurrection of Christ that the dramatic transformation took place. They had seen Jesus alive from the dead (v.20) and that began a great transformation in their lives. The rulers hoped that they had gotten rid of Jesus. But because of the fact that Jesus lives, they now face two men just as mighty in word and deed through the power of the risen Christ! The healing of the man who was born lame was a powerful evidence of the resurrection. Jesus was still doing the same kind of miracles after His resurrection than He did before His resurrection.

Do you believe that Jesus is alive from the dead? Does that belief impact your life? Not only should a belief in the resurrection make a difference in your life, but the risen life of Jesus itself should make a great difference. Gal. 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me....” The resurrected Christ lives in His people, and His resurrection life continues to transform people.

C. The Holy Spirit - V.8 says that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹ That explains the change in his life. Whereas before Peter was cowardly in the presence of opposition, now he is as bold as a lion, as his opponents clearly recognized in v.13. The greatest transformation did not come until the Holy Spirit filled their lives, beginning on the day of Pentecost. It is one thing to know the Word of God, but it is often something else to put it into practice. This requires power which comes from the Holy Spirit. 2 Cor. 3:18 says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [*metamorphoo*] into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Yes, we are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Titus 3:5 talks about God saving us “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, and He continues to work in our lives to make us new.

I am normally quiet, shy, and reserved, but when I am filled with the Holy Spirit, I am transformed into someone quite different, especially when I preach.

So if you are going to be transformed from a sinner to a wonderful, loving saint of God, you need to be transformed the same way Peter and John were transformed. Eph. 5:18 says, “...be filled with the Holy Spirit.” You and I need the filling of the Holy Spirit as they were. How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? First, we should seek this filling in prayer and by faith. Jesus said in Lk. 11:13, “...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Then, one condition of being filled with the Spirit is obedience. To be filled by the Spirit requires a willingness to be controlled by the Spirit. Peter and John were being obedient to the Lord in preaching the gospel to the crowds, and even before the Sanhedrin. That is one reason they were filled by the Spirit on this occasion. So we should be willing to step out in faith and obedience to do things that require the filling of the Holy Spirit if we want to be filled with the Spirit.

So avail yourself of the same means of transformation, and you, too, will be transformed by God. Now let’s see together:

II. THE EVIDENCES OF THIS TRANSFORMATION

We now need to consider the question, “Have I been changed?” If the following evidences of transformation in Peter and John are not evident in your life, then you either have not been converted, or you still need to experience a greater transformation. So notice the following evidences of transformation found in our text:

A. Boldness – Notice in v.13 that “they saw the boldness of Peter and John.” Even the enemies of Christ acknowledged the boldness of Peter and John. “Boldness” (*parrhesia*) literally means, “All speech.” Normally, in the presence of this Council, Peter would have been timid, quiet, and fearful. A few months before Peter denied Christ 3 times. But now, things are different. Peter spoke freely and without reservation. Prov. 28:1 says, “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

Have you experienced the God-given boldness to share your faith in Christ? It is strange how so many people can be so talkative about everything but spiritual matters. Too often we lack this boldness.

What should we do if we lack boldness? First, we need to pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. That’s exactly what the apostles did in v.29. Secondly, if we will remember that people are indeed lost without Christ, that should help us to be bolder in our witness. The need is too great to keep silent. Finally, be involved in a witnessing community. Though we may be afraid to speak

¹ See also 4:31; 7:55; 13:9 for other examples of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

when alone, the presence of another Christian with us can increase our courage. That is one reason why Jesus sent His disciples out two by two.

Peter and John were bold because they experienced another characteristic of the transformed life:

B. Fearlessness – As we see from vv.5-6, Peter and John were standing before the same court that condemned Jesus to death. Yet, they show no fear of them. They had well learned the words of Jesus who had said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul...” (Mt. 10:28). So notice from this text the fearlessness of Peter and John. First of all, in v.10 Peter boldly turned the tables on the Sanhedrin and put them on trial. He said, “Let it be known to you all, 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 stands here before you whole.” Peter boldly charged the Sanhedrin with the responsibility for the death of Jesus. Their action was obviously unjust, for God reversed their plot by raising Him from the dead, and their unjust action was also demonstrated by the power of Jesus to continue to heal. Peter’s fearlessness is further seen in that there was no thought of using guarded language that might make his lot easier. I wonder if John leaned over to Peter and whispered, “Now we are *really* in trouble!”

Well, the leaders did not give heed to Peter’s preaching. Instead, they decided to threaten them with harsh punishment. But notice the fearless response in vv.19-20, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” They refused to obey the council, for it was in conflict with obedience to God. Even though the judgment of man was imminent, they chose to obey God rather than men. Their fearlessness enabled them to ignore the threats of the Jewish leaders. They were not in the least intimidated. Their words and example have inspired persecuted Christians throughout the history of the church.

A tribute was once paid to the Scottish reformer John Knox (1514-1572): “He feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.”²

Even so, we need to allow God to transform us into fearless Christians, not fearing what man may do, but only fearing God. We must guard against the temptation to tone down our gospel so that we avoid persecution or rejection by unbelievers. If we tone down the gospel, we will lose the power of the Holy Spirit.

There was another evidence of their transformed life and that was their:

C. Knowledge and Ability – In v.13 we see that when the Sanhedrin “perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled....” They marveled because on the one hand they lacked formal education. Though I’m sure they were home educated as children, they never received a formal education in the rabbinical schools. “Untrained” simply means that they were like a “layman” in contrast to a rabbi. They were not viewed as professionals but amateurs. Peter and John were just fishermen when Jesus called them. Likewise, Jesus never went to the rabbinical schools, and He was criticized for it (Jn. 7:15). Not only did Peter lack formal education, but he used to always stick his foot in his mouth about every time he spoke. But in spite of these facts, Peter and John had become powerful, eloquent, and knowledgeable speakers, expounding Scripture well. So it is no wonder that they marveled at these men.

So if you will allow God to transform your life, people will be surprised at what you are now able to do, and what you now know. We have some lay people in this church who have never

² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Acts* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p.38.

been to seminary, but they manifest great competence in the Word of God. This is one indication of people who have been transformed by Jesus Christ!

So I ask you this morning can people see these evidences that God has transformed your life? Do you have boldness, fearlessness, and a new ability to speak for God? Not all Christians are going to be endowed with great speaking ability. In such cases the Holy Spirit will bestow some other spiritual gift that enables you to do what you could never do before. Has God changed your life morally? If there is little transformation of life from the time you professed Christ as Savior, then you either need to be born again, or you need a greater filling of both the Word of God in the Spirit of God.

So I have shared with you how God transforms your life, and the characteristics of a transformed life. Now let us consider together:

III. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF THIS TRANSFORMATION

Why is it that God wants to transform your life? It is certainly for your own benefit. But He has another reason in mind. A transformed life is one of the best witnesses for Jesus Christ. Furthermore, God wants to transform your life to enable you to become an effective witness for Him, to lead others to Christ. God wants people to be saved from their sins. Billions are lost without Christ, so He wants us to become witnesses of Jesus, who is the Savior. So notice with me:

A. We Are Commanded to Witness – In v.19 Peter said, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.” Here Peter implies that they had a clear command from God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in Acts 1:8 Jesus had said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” I believe that command has never been rescinded!

B. We Should Have an Inward Compulsion to Witness – Next Peter says in v.20, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” It’s as if Peter is saying, “We’ve seen Christ; He is alive. *We must* tell it to others.” How can they keep such wonderful news to themselves? Jeremiah tried to quit preaching, but then he said, “His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not” (Jer. 20:9). He could not quit. Likewise, Paul said in 1 Cor. 9:16, “...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” Some people are so full of God that they can’t keep quiet about the Lord.

This reminds me of the story of four lepers in 2 Kings chapter 7 who were starving in the siege of Samaria. So they decided to surrender to the army of the Syrians in hopes that they would feed them. But through the Providence of God, the Syrian army left in a rush and the lepers came upon abundant supplies of food and water. They started eating and drinking, and taking some of the spoils for themselves. Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household” (v.9).

Even so, for us to keep silent when we have found the Bread of life and the Water of life is not right. We are morally obligated to tell others of the salvation we have found in Christ.

C. Our Transformed Life Is a Witness - What kind of impact did their transformation have upon unbelievers? V.4 of our text indicates that thousands more were converted to Christ through the preaching of Peter and John. Then we see how effective their witness was here in v.13. It was not so much what Peter and John *said* that astonished the Council, as the fact of their being

composed and bold enough to say anything. God took two fishermen who had never gone to the professional schools of their day. And yet they became much greater religious leaders than the trained rabbis of their day. 1 Cor. 1:27 says, “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.” God desires to take those who are weak, and transform them into someone who is strong in the Lord. God wants to take someone who is foolish in this world’s eyes, and give them God’s wisdom to confound the wise.

Can unbelievers see a transformation in your life? Have people noticed that whereas you used to speak profanity from time to time, now they never hear it from your lips. Whereas you used to lose control of your temper, now you control it. Or perhaps you used to abuse alcohol, but now you have been set free. They will no doubt wonder why you have experienced such a transformation. The hostile men in Acts 4 wondered the same thing. But the last of v.13 gives the answer: “they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” That is exactly what we want. We want people to conclude that getting to know Jesus is the reason for the change in our lives. Your transformed life should lead to the situation that Peter talks about in 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Conclusion: Are there evidences in your life of God’s transforming activity? Are you at least at times bold and fearless in your witness for Christ? Has God given you knowledge, and certain abilities that you at one time did not possess? Has your life changed morally? If you cannot honestly say that God has significantly changed your life, then you need to make sure you are saved. Make sure you have been born again. Then, are you taking those steps that are necessary to experience a transformation of life? Are you reading and studying God’s Word? Do you believe that Christ is alive in you? Are you filled with the Spirit?

God has provided all you need to be transformed. He has given His Word. He has given His Spirit. Now your part is to make a commitment to allow God to transform your life so you can become an effective witness for Him. Trust Him today.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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