

Our Priority: Boldness

Upside Down

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 4. Now if you're a first-time guest or visitor with us today, I want to encourage you to join us in this season as we as a family of faith just simply walking through the book of Acts with really two intentions. Number 1 is to look back at 2,000 years in those early days when we first discovered that the tomb was empty, that Jesus Christ was alive. I think oftentimes we look back in the book of Acts and we have this natural tendency to say, "Well, that was back then, it's a different day today." And even though events like we addressed last week as Pentecost have never been duplicated, the principles behind them, the mentality that the early believers took, what that shares with us today is that we can have the same approach they did and experience at some level the same pouring out that they did as well. And the second reason is this, in Acts 17:6, they are just a few years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, one of the most marvelous statements in all of your Bible is found, it said these men have turned the world upside down.

Now think about that for a moment. These men who just a little over 100 of them were huddled up in the Upper Room days after what we know as the resurrection, these men that as we're about to read in a moment were considered unlearned and ignorant, these men who society had marginalized long before they walked with Jesus, these men who didn't have the physical structures we have, the budgets we have, the technology we have, these men turned the world upside down. So how is it that with all of our resources and all of our means that we can see the same thing take place in our life, in our personal life and in our culture today?

When we come to Acts 4, the first official wave of persecution has been instrumented. They have returned, for lack of better terms, from that experience and what you're going to see is that the early believers, the early church is going to have a prayer meeting and when they pray, what they pray for is strategically important for us to hear today. We're going to talk about what is the priority of the early church. Do you know what they prayed for? Boldness. That was their one prayer. "God, would you help us to be bold?"

Now in a moment, we're going to deal with the definitions of what that means but can I kind of preempt that because we're about to read that word three times in this passage. When you are bold, that doesn't mean you're a jerk. When you're bold, it doesn't mean

you're rude. When you're bold, it doesn't mean you're brash. I mean, how many times kind of with the cynicism in our voice has somebody said a statement to us and we'll go, "Well, that was bold"? When we read those words today, don't think in those terms.

Chapter 4, beginning in verse 13. It says,

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Now those of you who are seasoned veterans here know the next word that's coming, verse 19, "But,"

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. 23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Listen to verse 29,

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. 31 And when they had prayed, the place was

shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Now we'll get there toward the end of the message but can we all agree that's a prayer meeting that most of us have never been a part of?

So before we look at how these men demonstrated the boldness that they prayed for and before we look at the desire they had in this prayer meeting, I think it's very important to define what it means to be bold, what does it mean particularly in the book of Acts where we see this word almost a dozen times, typically translated "boldness," sometimes "extreme confidence," whatever it may be. What does that really look like? And so today, I'm going to simply give you the three primary definitions that are in your dictionary. This isn't going back to ancient languages. This isn't researching in the dusty catacombs of a library. This is simply what the word means and what we're going to discover is it probably doesn't mean what we typically claimed that it's meant.

The first thing we discover about boldness, it says they perceived boldness in them, they prayed for boldness. It's a response of courage. You know, the primary definition for somebody who is bold, somebody who exhibits boldness is a lack of hesitation in the face of fear or danger. That's not about "making progress" as much as it is about no retreating by definition. Now there's a lot of biblical examples that we could give to this but I'm reminded of the Israelites. They come out of what we know as Egypt after all those years of bondage. The Lord miraculously parts the Red Sea. They go into what we will eventually know as the wilderness. It didn't have to be the wilderness. Forty years they journeyed in that which should have taken 11 days. Why did it take 40 years? A lack of boldness.

Remember the story, the spies go in. Twelve of them go in and what do they report back? "You're not going to believe what we saw. Those guys are giants. They're huge. They're massive. They've got a military. They've got weapons. Even the fruit is larger than we could imagine." Remember when they brought back the report? Caleb said, "We can do this." It was Caleb and one other guy who said, "The Lord's got this. We're not going to back down. We're not going to stay in fear and danger." But what did the other 10 say? "Oh, woe is us!" They got what I call the spirit of Eeyore, "Woe is me. No, can't do this."

So what did the Israelites do? They began to murmur. They began to complain. They began to actually make this ridiculous statement, "We were better off in Egypt." So what happened? Forty years later an entire generation, and don't think age, think way of thinking, an entire generation of people perished in the wilderness. Why? Because of a lack of boldness. How many times do we see things around us dying, do we see perishing because much like those 10 spies we say, "There's no way God can do this"? But what did Caleb say? He said, "Give me the hill." You know, he was 85 years old when he said, "I believe God can give us the ground he's promised." It's a lack of hesitation in the face of danger or fear.

The second definition is one of confidence and that's a word that we naturally associate with boldness but when one is confident, they have a refusal to heed the judgment of others. Do we live in a judgmental society? Oh, we live in a society that says they do not judge but by not judging they're actually placing judgment. That's a whole other conversation. But when you are confident in who the Lord is and what he's doing and how he's moving in your life, then the opinion of either stranger or friend or foe matters not.

One of my favorite illustrations is whom we know as David. Notice I didn't say King David. This is the story before he was king. It's found in 1 Samuel 17. We know it as the story of David and Goliath. It's a great metaphor for the underdog gaining victory and typically used in the business world, the sports world, even the global political world. Anytime somebody who is the proverbial underdog wins the match, we always claim it was a David and Goliath event. But you know, it's oftentimes the backstory that makes the story. You realize that David was never meant to be at that famous battle. In fact, David being the youngest of Jesse's children was back home bearing the weight of all his other brothers. They were all, well, they weren't at battle, they were at the battle. Nobody was actually battling Goliath, that's part of the story.

And there's this line in 1 Samuel that I love. Now it's going to sound a little awkward to you but I just find it humorous, maybe it's because the Lord's blessed us with all boys in our house, but Jesse turns to David and says, "Go take your brother the cheeses." Now y'all may not find that humorous but that's just something I would never say, "Hey, son, could you take the cheeses to your brothers." I mean, it's just not something I would ever say. But nonetheless, that was the assignment. He was simply taking a sack lunch to his brothers who were on the battlefield.

You remember what happened? He shows up and he says, "Hey, guys, how's it going?" "Not too well." "You mean that's the only guy that's screaming and yelling? There's all of you and just one big, old, nasty guy and y'all can't do this?" Do you remember what they did? They started to judge him. They said, "Who do you think you are? You're just a little shepherd boy. You're the runt of the litter. Who gave you the authority to speak?" I love what David's response was, "Is there not a cause?" If he had listened to the judgment of his brothers, we wouldn't have the famous story of David and Goliath.

What about the judgment of those strangers? How many more individuals in Israel's army that day ridiculed him, mocked him, made fun of him, even King Saul said, "Okay, son, if you're gonna do this, you're gonna need my armor. Put it on." It was twice as big as it needed to be and he said, "Do you know what? You're just not fit for this." So what did David do? He goes down to the brook and he grabs five smooth stones and a slingshot and says, "Guys, watch this."

Think about that. That's boldness. He didn't listen to those who mocked him, who made fun of him. Now that being said, do you get kind of the theme here? We're living in a world that's gaining hostility toward Christianity, are we not? We're living in a world that we continue to see the volume that is raised up. It was volume in David's day. It was

volume in Caleb's day. How about the apostles that we just read about? Do you know what the third definition is? Consistency. It's consistency. It's the quality of one's life that goes beyond conventional thought. In other words, in Acts 12, the first apostle James will lose his life for the sake of the gospel. You know, it's at that point where you've got to kind of gather together at the proverbial white board and say, "Alright, maybe we need a Plan B." But did they? No.

When the next apostle lost his life, when over half of them had given their lives for the Lord, when you begin to walk through the first couple two or three centuries of what we know as the faith, you see 10 major either state-allowed or state-sponsored realms of persecution and yet what do we see? As one of the early church fathers said, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. You would think when Nero, the individual who led Rome in the first century was torturing not just privately but publicly the believers, you would think they'd say, "You know, maybe we need to reevaluate." It is not conventional thought to continue to speak and to stand when those who agree with you are losing their life around you. It's not conventional thought but it's boldness.

Now I want you to notice all those definitions. None of them are about "taking ground." None of them are about proceeding with a mentality of conquering anything, are they? No. In fact, you won't see anywhere in the book of Acts a mentality of conquering as much as they did, they stood for that which was right and true and let God go forth before them.

So how is this demonstrated? I want you to look in verse 13 of chapter 4. It says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John." What had they just observed? This is where it's demonstrated before us. The disciples gave testimony to the empty tomb. Basically if you want to put it in contemporary context, you could take the issues of the day, the subject matters of the day, all the things that are debated about, and they basically say, "Guys, what do you think about this?" I love verse 12. I didn't read it on purpose because I want to grab your attention. Go to verse 12 of chapter 4.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Is that courage? Absolutely. Why? Because they did not stand down, they did not back up from that which was exclusively politically incorrect to be true. You do realize that the Caesars in Rome claimed to be gods themselves. You remember at the trial of Jesus one of the accusations was, "He's claiming that he is more powerful, more important, and higher than the Caesar." And yet what did they say? There is no name whereby we must be saved. That is courage. They did not back down in the face of opposition.

How about confidence? Oh absolutely. You realize that everybody in chapter 4 who is trying to get them to back off, get them to quiet down, get them to say, "Guys, it's really not that big a deal." Every one of them, at least here in chapter 4, was from a Jewish context. Why is that important? Because the Jesus Christ that's mentioned in verse 12 is the same one that was prophesied in Isaiah 53. It's the same one that was prophesied all

throughout scripture. The Messiah. The coming one. They had rejected him on Calvary. They had ignored the reality of the empty tomb and now they're even going as far as to say, "Well, even though a man has been healed and even though these men won't be quiet, it's not for me." Do you think they were getting some judgment, so to speak?

You see, they demonstrated to us what does it look like to be bold. Did their message ever waver? Not at all. Neither is there salvation in any other. Did they listen to the advice? No. What did they do? They had a prayer meeting and they go right back out and they continued to be consistent. You know, I don't know about in your world but I think at some level, in some capacity in all of our lives, we have those that are, shall we say, abrasive to us regarding our faith. Let me make this simple. Maybe you're here today saying, "You know what? I'm the only person in my family who is a believer." Maybe you're the only person at your workplace that's a believer. Or maybe you've observed this discouraging trend, a lot of people who claim to be believers, speak a lot of the language, have a lot of the outward trappings, but as people begin to question them about the exclusive truth of Jesus Christ and what the Bible says about specific issues, they kind of take a step back and go, "Well, it just depends on how you see it." Or, "Well, you know, it's just a different day today." But what do you see? You begin to see them waffle and become lukewarm, whatever description of adjective you want to give it. And what does it look like to be that one person in the office? What does it look like to be that one family member? What does it look like to truly understand that you're the only light in a very dark world? How is this demonstrated? How is it lived out in our life?

Some years ago, I had an individual that approached me because of the position that I held but it was, to be honest, it was all about his needs in life. It was an individual that was somewhat older than me that had found himself in somewhat of a legal bind, so much so that there was a day coming in his future where there were going to be witnesses that were brought forth to testify of his character, and one of the suggestions that a judge made was that he befriend a local church and a pastor because it would bode well for him in the legal system. So this individual showed up to the church one day during the week, entertained a conversation with myself, shared with me the situation he was in. Not a believer, not interested in anything regarding the faith. To be honest, he just needed someone to vouch that he wasn't as "bad" as they were going to claim that he was.

So over the course of the next couple of months, we readily got to know each other. He would stop by or make an appointment and we would talk and discuss things, and have you ever known one of those persons in your life? I'm sure you have this person that it doesn't matter what the subject matter is, they're going to jab you. You know what I mean. He wasn't interested in the things of God, he was just interested in not going to jail, that's what it boiled down to. And so anytime we would go to matters of faith, or anytime we would talk about one of the "hot button" issues of the day, he would just kind of jab me. Can we all confess it is tough to keep your composure, is it not? It's tough to stand in the face of somebody who's purposefully using words just to see if they can get you riled up, purposefully raising their voice just to see if you'll retaliate.

One of the things he did in addition to stopping by and jabbing me is that he would come every Sunday to one of our worship services and just like we have here, we have a guest reception after all the services. He would always stop by and guess what he'd do? Jab me. He'd say, "Oh, I heard what you said today but have you ever thought about this?" Jab. Or he'd say, "Well, you didn't think about this." Jab. I mean, it was every Sunday. I could see him coming and I knew what was coming. It's almost, hey, I'll give you a Baptist word, has anybody ever come to you and said, "Can I tell you something in love?" You know what the proper response is? No. That's Baptist for I'm about to jab you, is what that means.

I mean, week after week after week. About 2-3 months down the road, he's approaching me at the guest reception like he always did, here was the difference. There was a countenance about him that was just different. Something, I can't describe it. You've seen it on somebody's face. He just looked different and when he came into the room, he grabbed me by the arm. Now don't think something that would cause the security team to get upset. It wasn't a violent act, it was like a sincere, like I want to talk to you. He pulls me with his arm, stares me straight in the eye and makes this strange declaration, he said, "Jeff, you actually believe this stuff, don't you?" Yeah, I do. Why did he come to that conclusion? Because in the face of opposition, in the face of retaliation, in the face of all the things that took place, did I ever go over to his house and just start verbally blasting him? No. I did exactly what this definition is, it's called boldness, guys. Boldness is not backing off when the attack comes. Boldness is not giving in when they want you to water down the message. And boldness is just hanging in there when you see them coming and going, "Well, here comes my whooping for the day." That's boldness demonstrated.

So the next question we have to ask is so how does this happen in our life? How can we actually live this out? Because it's one thing to talk about it, it's another thing to go out of here today and have somebody come up to you and say, "Can I tell you something in love?" I mean, it's different, right? I want you to notice the prayer meeting that takes place beginning in verse 23. It's an interesting setting of words. These men gather together and they basically call out God for all that he had promised in days past, all the ways that he had moved mightily, and for lack of better terms, they called God on the carpet and say, "Alright, God, you've moved mightily in the past, you've done great things in the past, but we're getting beat up here and this isn't easy." Then you get to verse 29, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together." Now find for me in verse 29 where they prayed for the place to shake. They didn't, did they? They didn't go into this and say, "Alright, God, I need you to shake the pillars. I need you to move some mountains." It says, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Where do you find in that prayer of verse 29 where they said, "God, we need you to fill us. We need to be more surrendered. Help us out, God." It was a very simple prayer.

We need boldness. Let me tell you why they prayed for it: because they were struggling with it. They had just gotten beat up, not just physically but verbally. They were outnumbered. They were out-volumed. Does this sound like our world today? So what have they got? We need some boldness here.

Now you read verse 31 and let's be honest, I know I come from a traditionally Baptist perspective. I've probably been in hundreds if not over a thousand prayer meetings in my life. I've never seen verse 31. I've never been in a place where when people cried out to God the building shook. I've never been in a place where you see what you see in verse 31. It's not a part of the life that I've lived and I would daresay probably not yours either. You see, we read verse 31 and we say, you know, the problem with these passages is, you know, that was 2,000 years ago. And we can make all kinds of formal biblical excuses about the day in which they lived and the time and such and how God was moving, but really all we're doing is trying to make ourselves feel better about not experiencing what they experienced.

So how would it bode today if there's actually a story that sounds like verse 31 that's only 70 years old? How about a story of God moving in such a way, in such a manner that buildings actually shook and boldness went forth? You may have never heard of a group of islands off the coast of Scotland called the Hebrides. It's a group or an area of land masses there and the story that I'm about to share with you took place right after World War II in the late '40s, early '50s. There was an incredible revival movement that swept through what we know as the Hebrides islands. We call it the Hebrides Revival and the reason that we know about it, it's not just the thousands of testimonies of those who experienced this, but there's a very well-known and well-versed pastor by the name of Duncan Campbell who's not only very well-known and respected but he wrote all about it because he was there.

Now here's the thing you need to understand about Duncan Campbell. He was the furthest thing from a Pentecostal, if you know what I mean. He preferred a monotone approach to faith and when somebody from that perspective talks about some of the things he talked about, you know it was God moving in their midst.

There were some believers there much like you and I today. They felt outnumbered. They felt outmatched, kind of like Acts 4. They had experienced some level of persecution both verbally and physically. They felt as if their actions were just in vain. Have you ever had one of those feelings in your walk with the Lord that you take two steps forward and three steps back? It was kind of one of those perspectives and so they would gather regularly just like you are today and they would gather with extra times and Bible studies and prayer meetings just to no avail.

Finally, Duncan Campbell as well as others who were a part of this group of small believers, completely outnumbered, completely out-volumed. One night they had a worship service just like we would on a regular occurrence. Nothing moved. Nothing special. Kind of just tick off the box and go down the road. That night, some of them were impressed to say, "You know what? Maybe we just need to pray. Maybe we just

need to be honest before God. Maybe we just need to cry out because whatever we're doing is just not working." So that night late at night after they put all the children to bed and such, they gathered there in the Hebrides in a small what we would probably call hut, so to speak. I mean, it was rudimentary. It wasn't real fancy but it was a dwelling place though it be small. And it was approaching midnight or a little thereafter. They had been praying for a while and it was, you know, like most prayer meetings, it was sweet, it was sincere, it was heartfelt, tears of joy, compassion. We've all been there at some level whether privately or corporately.

Then the records show that one of the individuals called on a young man to pray. He was a blacksmith by trade. Now I'm not against those who compete in "Forged in Fire" but can we all agree that traditionally throughout time, those who serve as a blacksmith typically don't earn PhD's in their field or profession. Remember what it said in verse 13 about these guys? We perceive that these are unlearned and ignorant men. Here's a young man in his early 20s, a blacksmith by trade. He was called upon to pray. Now I'm going to paraphrase his prayer this morning because it's shocking to hear. Here is what he prayed in their midst. He said, "O God, we are thirsty people in a dry land. You have moved in days past but you haven't moved in days present. We have done everything you've asked us to do and you have not shown up. Your honor is at stake." Now I don't know about you, but lightning has a 12 foot radius and I'd be out of there. Can you imagine staring in the face of God and saying, "Because you haven't moved, your honor is at stake." How can you pray that? Do you remember last week, a message that was powerful, messengers that were living for the Lord. This young man, he could go before the Lord and he cried out and he said, "God, your name's at stake. Your honor's at stake." Those that were there recorded in their journals that that little hut began to shake, so much so that a couple of plates actually fell off the rack.

It sounds isolated, it sounds like a neat story, but that's not really the story because what did they pray for here? Boldness. They didn't pray for the building to shake. Okay, fine, the building shakes, that's great but how does that help you tomorrow at the office? How does that help you when you're dealing with someone who's obstinate, who won't turn their life around? "Guess what, the building shook last night." Do you know what their response is going to be? "I don't care."

So the building shook. It was a little after midnight, a small group of people somewhat stunned decided to go outside. Remember, outnumbered, outmatched, and there before them were hundreds of people still in their bedclothes carrying their own chairs to the church saying, "Please tell us about this Jesus. We need to know him." And what we know as the Hebrides Revival for 5-6 years thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people saved, gave their heart to the Lord, pastors called out by the hundreds all because a small group and one particular unlearned, ignorant man said, "God, we just want boldness. We just don't want to hesitate in the face of danger. We just want to be able to stand when people speak ill of us and when everybody tells us why do you keep going, we just want to keep going." Not only did those outside perceive their boldness but what did they do? They prayed, "God, give us boldness."

Now the room may or may not shake, that's really not the main part of the story, but they spoke the word of God with boldness. Ladies and gentlemen, there's a lot of attributes of the faith and aspects of the faith that we could solicit and desire and "want," but if there's one thing we need as individuals, if there's one thing we need as a corporate body of believers, we need the boldness that they had 2,000 years ago. We need the boldness that they had in the Hebrides. We need God to show up and give us the strength to not back down, not stop, not quit, not give in and keep going when the world says, "Just shut up and get in the corner." We need the boldness not to go conquering but to not stop and quit.