Back to the Basics - Part Three

# Speak Boldly

## (Acts 4:23-31)

We are continuing today in our message series, “Back to the Basics” and we’re going to be looking at Acts chapter four. Now, if you’ve never read the book of Acts, it is a book of history, but it’s more than just looking at how the church began, it’s actually a study of the acts of the Holy Spirit in the church. And so, if you’ve never read it, I would recommend reading it, because it is an amazing story of God working through ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary.

Today, as we study the book of Acts, we are not just looking at it from the perspective of this is what God used to do, but rather from the perspective that this is what he wants to do through us today. In other words, this isn’t just what the church used to be like, this is what our future together looks like, because the way he worked through them is the same way that he wants to work through us today. And so, I hope I’ve got your attention, because we are leaning into the future, understanding that this is what it looks like for us to be on mission as God’s people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As we turn to the Word of God, let me set up the context for you. Since the resurrection, the church in Jerusalem has experienced exponential growth. In Acts chapter one, we saw a church of one hundred and twenty people. In Acts chapter two, we saw the introduction of the Holy Spirit and three thousand people were added to the church. That gives me hope, because if the Holy Spirit could work through the church in Jerusalem, in a culture that had just crucified Jesus of Nazareth, I am sure that he could do the same through us today.

And so, it’s in that context as we turn to the Scriptures in Acts chapter three, that we find two of the disciples, Peter and John, going up to the temple at the time of prayer — at three in the afternoon (Acts 3:1).

As they are about to enter the temple courts, they came upon this man who had been lame from birth, begging outside the temple gate. When he asked them for money, without hesitating, Peter looked straight at him and said,

“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6).

Now, remember, this man had never walked a day in his life, but the Bible says,

“Instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk” (Acts 3:7).

In other words, with a command in the name of Jesus, this lame man is totally healed with no deductible or co-pay and no physical therapy. His healing is public, it is visible, it is instantaneous, and it is confirmed by Doctor Luke who is writing this. He said in verse eight, “The beggar went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8).

And so, this was amazing, it was a miracle, the people were astonished, and a crowd began forming. Peter said to them,

“Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (Acts 3:12).

In other words, “It wasn’t us. We didn’t do this. It was Jesus who healed him.”

And so, they were like, “How did a dead man heal him?”

Peter said, “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this” (Acts 3:15).

“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see” (Acts 3:16).

The people were like, “Tell us more.” And so, Peter said, “I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders” (Acts 3:17).

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

As Peter and John were still speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and some of the Sadducees (a religious group among the Jews).

“They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day” (Acts 4:3).

Once again, the church grew exponentially because of the testimony of this man’s healing by Jesus who had been crucified and rose again.

“Many who heard the Apostle’s message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

But the religious leaders were greatly disturbed, not because of the healing of this beggar, but because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:2).

In other words, they didn’t have a problem with this man who had been healed, they were happy for him, but they had a problem with what the Apostles were speaking and teaching the people.

In fact, you may have noticed, it’s the same in America today. If we go out and feed the hungry, help the hurting and broken, support single moms, kids without fathers, even volunteering in the public schools, there is no controversy until someone asks us why we do what we do. Suddenly, the moment we begin speaking, talking about Jesus who loved us, who died for us, and rose again. Jesus who told us to love our neighbors, to love one another as he has loved us, suddenly the moment we begin talking about what we know to be the truth there is a problem.

But still, we can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. Like Peter and John, the world may not like what we are saying, but we must continue to do so boldly. And so, they went to jail, not for anything that they had done wrong, but they went to jail for what they did right. Of course, the religious leaders could find no reason to keep them, and so they were briefly detained, persecuted for speaking in the name of Jesus and then released.

Acts chapter four, verse twenty-three says,

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them” (Acts 4:23).

I wonder whom you go to in your time of need? Because when we talk about friends, talking about our own people, we do so from the context of a culture where families are fragmented and fractured. Today, everybody is divided, running off here and there with their own agenda, their own future, and so we don’t really have a lot of close personal relationships.

In our culture today, you can’t even be sure who you can trust, who you can confide in, or who you can run to in your time of need. And so, people don’t want to get involved in the church, they don’t want to build relationships within the church, because maybe they have been hurt in the past by someone who claimed to be a Christian or maybe they’re just too busy. But then when something bad happens, suddenly they run to the church, and they want this microwave relationship. In other words, they want close friends whom they can trust and lean on right now, but unfortunately good relationships take time.

Who do you run to in your time of need? It’s not always a matter of needing better friends, because sometimes we just need to be better friends. In fact, the Bible says, “There is a friend…” Are you that friend? The Holy Spirit said,

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

And so, Peter and John are released from jail and the first thing they do is go back to their own people, they go back to the church to be strengthened and encouraged. That’s why it’s so important to build relationships in the church, to have your friends in place, and to do that before your time of trial comes.

Peter and John headed straight for their own people and when they got together, verse twenty-four says,

“They raised their voices together in prayer to God” (Acts 4:24).

This is why gathering together with other believers is so important, because your non-Christian friends can give you counsel from their perspective, but they can’t join with you in prayer and open the Scriptures asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom to lead you and guide you.

And so, having Christian brothers and sisters is super important because Jesus said,

“In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

You can count on it, it is inevitable, it is going to come.

Peter and John went up to the temple at the time of prayer when trouble comes. They are put in jail, not because of something they did wrong, but because they were talking about Jesus. When they had been released, they gathered together with the church, they opened the Scriptures and they prayed. That’s why the Bible tells us,

“Build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

This is a tremendous example given to us by the Holy Spirit, by the early church, if we hope to live significant and victorious Christian lives.

You see, prayer and the Word of God are our weapons in an age where there is a greater hostility toward the Christian faith than there ever has been in any of our lifetimes. And so, we have got to be grounded in the truth of God’s word and able to stand firm, knowing what the Bible says, obeying what the Bible says, and telling others what the Bible says. And in tandem with that, we need to pray like we’ve never prayed before. Look at their prayer in verse twenty-four,

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24).

To say that God is sovereign doesn’t mean that everything that happens is what God wants. It simply means that he is above all, he rules over all, and when he determines to do something, nothing can stop him, because there is no one like him, no one greater in glory or in power.

In other words, Jesus is Sovereign, Jesus is Lord, and he sits on a throne that is above every other throne. He said,

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of lords, and so when we talk about him being sovereign, we are talking about him ruling from a throne that is above every other throne. In fact, that’s exactly what the psalmist said,

“For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods” (Psalms 95:3).

What’s challenging for us today is that we can see most clearly God’s plan and what God has decided to do in the rearview mirror and not in the windshield. In other words, we can see it, we can recognize it, but it’s only in hindsight.

Some of you might be praying, “Sovereign Lord, show me your plan.” You may be stressed out, worried and anxious, wondering what the plan is? And he might say to you, “I have already told you the plan. The plan is to…

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

But the truth is that we always want more details and that is difficult because we are living in an age of faith. In other words, we walk by faith and not by sight, we don’t have any idea what the plan is, but we follow the one who does. In fact, the Bible says it this way,

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face… then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

In other words, in his grace God allows us to see things dimly, to look back, looking in the rearview mirror, and see how he was faithful yesterday, so that we are able to trust that he will be faithful in our tomorrow.

And so, they began to pray to the Lord, and they are quoting Scripture back to God, this is from Psalms chapter two, and they said,

“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One” (Acts 4:25-26).

And so, they are declaring the Word of God knowing that even though the nations and peoples, the kings and rulers had a plan, the Sovereign Lord had a bigger and better plan.

And then, these guys who just got out of jail, begin boldly and courageously naming their adversaries.

“Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:27-28).

That’s what it means to be sovereign, you have the ability to use everything that happens for what you want. And so, the political leaders, the religious leaders, and the people made a plan to kill Jesus, to kill the Anointed One. But Jesus told Pilate,

"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11).

In other words, whatever happens was part of God’s plan, he was working through it all, and so Jesus’ blood is on all of our hands, but we only did what God had decided beforehand should happen. For all have sinned and fall short of his glory and we are merely pawns in God’s plan, because the Bible says,

“He chose us in him before the creation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

And so, God has a plan, you are part of that plan, and he will do everything that he promised to do, and he will empower you to do whatever he commands you to do. And that is why, if you are a Christian, you need the Holy Spirit to empower you, so that you can follow God’s plan for your life.

In other words, you are working together with God, the Holy Spirit is working through you, and that is why the disciples prayed,

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (Acts 4:29).

Because even though that is how they found themselves in trouble in the first place, they prayed for the power of the Holy Spirit, and for a continuation of that boldness. They are not praying for victory over their enemies or deliverance from the troubles, but they are praying that he changes them and gives them boldness in spite of the threats of the authorities so that they can keep speaking and more and more people could come to know Jesus and be saved.

And so, they pray, “Lord, we need you to back us up, give us some credibility.”

“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30).

And so, they are praying, “Jesus, whatever happens here, anything miraculous, supernatural, or good that happens, let it be in your name so that more people know that you are Lord and that you are alive.” In other words, let it be known that it is the living Jesus working here and now, he is the one who heals, he is the one who saves. And so, every time somebody is healed, or a demon is cast out, or a person is delivered from addiction, or healed from cancer, we want to let it be known it’s through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

And then, after they prayed, the Spirit of God moved powerfully in verse thirty-one says,

“The place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

Once again, this was another visible sign, a physical manifestation of the Spirit of God doing something extraordinary, something miraculous, something supernatural, so that faith is increased and that more people would know that Jesus is alive.

And so, on the night of the resurrection, that first Sunday night he came into the upper room and breathed the Holy Spirit into his disciples. For the next forty days he showed up for visits, demonstrating that he was alive, before ascending back to heaven. Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit comes visibly on the day of Pentecost like tongues of fire and a mighty rushing wind and empowers the disciples to preach the gospel.

Now, once again, they are praying and they get another visible sign as the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit again.

And so, there are many fillings of the Holy Spirit, we are commanded in the Scriptures to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so, we want to joyfully submit every aspect of our body soul and spirit to him and receive the Holy Spirit. As we do, we are increasingly conformed to the loving character of Christ who dwells within us and we are being empowered to make his name known.

Now, just in case some of you are confused, you received the Holy Spirit upon salvation. When you were born again the Spirit came to dwell within you. The Bible tells us in Ephesians, that you “were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and having believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13).

And so, that is the seal of your redemption, your salvation, but then as you seek God there are many fillings that happen throughout the course of your life to empower you for boldness to be on mission with Jesus.

And so, if you’ve been born again and you are filled with the Holy Spirit there is a love for Jesus in you that you can’t contain, it comes out of you as you tell others about Jesus, because you love him and you want his love to be made known to them.

When we think about being filled with the Holy Spirit it’s kind of like putting gas in your car. And just like when you buy a car its filled with gas, but that’s not all that you get, you keep filling it up over and over and over again.

In other words, you don’t buy a car with gas in the tank and ignore it for years. No, you fill it up one week, then you fill it up again for the next week, and you fill it up again for the next week because the resources in your tank begin to dwindle and they disappear. And so, we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul used an expression of being poured out, and so we want to replenish our supply, the divine resource within us, because each day we are on mission with Jesus, and so we need the Holy Spirit to fill us as we go. In fact, it may be a good reminder, every time you fuel up your car, pray,

“Holy Spirit, fill me so that I might have the power and boldness to testify for Jesus wherever I go. Help me carry out the mission that is before me.”

I believe God wants you to pray that prayer, that is a God honoring prayer, that is a faith filled prayer, and if you do that every time you fuel up your car, as you fill up your tank, you will be reminded that God needs to fill up your tank. That’s why he said to wait for power, because you need fuel for your journey, power for the great commission.

I know that some of you are quiet, you are shy and introverted like me but you need to repent. You need to repent of your fear, repent of being nervous, repent of avoiding conflict, and invite the Holy Spirit to make you bold so that you could share the love of Jesus with others.

As we close, I want to give you an opportunity to respond, for those of you who are not Christians, I want to invite you to turn from your sin and put your trust in Jesus. Call upon him. Call upon the name of Jesus and ask him to forgive you of your sins and give you a new life. That may be your first act of boldness to give your life to Jesus and identify with God’s people.

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