

ACTS

Part 9 – “Bold Discipleship”

Acts 4:1-22

Main Idea: The bold proclamation of Jesus as Savior and risen Lord led to the persecution of the disciples which led, ironically, to the further proclamation of Jesus.

For the first time the disciples encounter persecution. The first four verses describe the arrest of Peter and John by the temple authorities. Thus begins a pattern of opposition which will increase in severity as the narrative unfolds. We also see in this passage another reference to the disciple’s boldness, a recurring theme in Acts.

Discipleship – A disciple is one who attaches himself to a teacher for the purpose of being conformed to the teacher’s example. Disciples of Jesus therefore are committed to conformity to their Lord. *Discipleship* is the life-long process of being conformed to Christ by God’s grace through means He has provided.

Boldness – A repeated theme in Acts. The once timid and frightened disciples are now bold in their preaching. Repeatedly Luke describes the power of the Holy Spirit functioning to make Jesus’ disciples bold.

1. Bold discipleship is confident in the power of the gospel. (vv. 1-4)

- The Sadducees were particularly annoyed by the disciples of Jesus for their preaching of a resurrection; doctrine denied by the Sadducees. The religious rulers of the temple were also annoyed by the initial reception of the apostolic message concerning Jesus.
- As Luke reports, the number of converts is quite large. Depending upon how we interpret Luke’s language, there were anywhere from 5,000 to an exponentially higher number. It all depends upon whether or not Luke uses “men” as a reference to all those who believed or only the male converts. Whatever the case, at this point it pleased God to bring in many thousands at the outset of the apostle’s ministry.

Vs. 4 – “But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”

- The central activity of the apostles in Acts was the proclamation of God’s Word. Not all Christians, not even most Christians are called to preach. However, all disciples of Jesus are heralds of the gospel. Once again the disciples demonstrate their confidence in the power of the gospel. At no point does Peter appeal to the miracle of the healed man as that which can bring about conversion. Rather, he preaches Christ crucified and risen. It is to this message that God has attached his promises to save all who believe.

2. Bold discipleship is dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 8 – “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders...”

- As he often does, Luke reminds us that the disciple’s boldness is dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that Peter is now confronting the very men who conspired against Jesus and turned him over to the Romans. These are the very men Peter and the other disciples had been hiding from not many months prior to this moment. The difference is the Holy Spirit mediating to the disciples the power of the risen Jesus.

3. Bold discipleship magnifies Jesus. (vv. 8-12)

Vv. 10-12 – “Let it be known to all of you 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 is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

- Jesus must be preached precisely because miracles are not the thing that brings about conversion. So bold disciples look for ways to lift up Jesus as the crucified and risen Savior. Notice how Peter continues to confront the Jewish religious leaders with their role in killing the Messiah. This is a dangerous message. Indeed it is this preaching of Christ crucified and risen that must be stopped for it exposes the sin of the religious authorities who plotted against the Son of God.

4. Bold discipleship is not the result of education or status.

Vs. 13 – “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

- This should not be seen as an endorsement of anti-intellectualism. Rather, what the people see as remarkable is the fact that Peter and John are preaching so effectively and boldly without any of the credentials that were possessed by the Sadducees and Pharisees. This was a message that could be proclaimed by those without formal educations or credentials.
- What is required of the disciple is that they have been with Jesus. In the context of the passage, this is to be taken quite literally. These men, Peter and John, had been with Jesus. However, we may, I believe, appropriate those words for our own context. Disciples of Jesus in our day are those for whom the Holy Spirit mediates the real presence of the risen Jesus. Apart from this we would surely fail and flee.

5. Bold discipleship willingly suffers for obedience to God. (vv. 15-22)

Vv. 18-20 – “So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

- Envy is probably at the heart of the opposition against Peter and John. The religious authorities are angered by the popular reception of their message. They cannot deny that a miracle has been performed. Tragically, they remain oblivious to the significance of the miracle as a sign vindicating the Lordship of Jesus. In their envy and pride, all they can see is their loss of popularity among the people.
- Of this incident Robert Rayburn writes:
 “Here is sin in its full ugliness as what it is at root -- the love and worship of oneself to the exclusion of others. These men would have been quite content to see this crippled man remain a cripple for the rest of his life rather than to have the credit for his healing go to Jesus Christ. Their entire course of action is dictated by their hatred of Jesus Christ, as someone likely to usurp their place -- never admitted, but always at work. Augustine argued that the basic, the essential nature of sin was *superbia* or pride. That is what is at work here and very powerfully, blinding them to the logic of this miracle.”

“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

- The disciples are witnesses to the risen and ascended Christ. They will not, indeed cannot be silent. The meaning of Christ’s death, resurrection, and reign must not be hushed. It is truth that demands proclamation. Disciples of Jesus will choose mockery, marginalization, and even persecution over silence.