

Courageous Evangelism – Acts 4:1-22

Acts 4. We're in the middle of a series on our **core values**. The qualities and attributes that describe who we are and what we do, at the core. From bold preaching, passionate worship, and fervent prayer; to courageous evangelism, intentional discipleship, and strategic church planting.

And we're focusing on them, because to the extent we *do*, we will abide by them and unite around them. To the extent we don't, we won't.

The first week was *bold preaching* – expository and applicational. Believing that the Bible is God's Word, we proclaim it in context and apply it to our lives. Second, was *intentional discipleship* – personal and in community. Believing in God's design for ministry and maturity, we teach the Scriptures and equip the saints to grow and do the same.

➤ This week, is **courageous evangelism** – in word and deed. With our mouths *and* our actions. Our actions *and* our mouth. Both. The whole “preach the Gospel” thing, “and if necessary use words,” is garbage. An unbiblical copout to make those who never *open* their mouth feel good about it.

Scripture emphasizes both. Especially the word part. It's courageous evangelism in word *and* deed. Deed *and* word.

And just in case you think of evangelism as only going door to door to witness, think again. Evangelism comes from the root word “evangel,” which means gospel; good news. Evangel and gospel are synonyms. So evangel-*ism*, is *proclaiming* that good news. Declaring it any time, any place, any way. So people embrace it.

Evangelism is proclaiming the Gospel so that people will believe and repent.

Proclaiming who Jesus is, what he did, and what it means for us. Namely, that he's God in the flesh, died for our sins, and rose again for our life; full and forever. A life that's ours, if we believe in him and repent of our sin. The very thing Peter proclaimed in Acts 3.

He had just healed a man, a crippled man, and says in 3:19-20 – *Repent therefore, and turn back* [from your sinful ways and wrong thinking], *that your sins may be blotted out, [20] that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.* (ESV) He proclaimed the Gospel so that people would believe and repent. Evangelism at its best.

➤ But the courageous part comes in chapter 4. V1.
[1] *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, [2] greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.* (ESV) The Gospel.

And that may not seem courageous, until you realize that the *Sadducees* were a religious sect of Judaism, who held all the power. And didn't *believe* in a resurrection; of Jesus or us. Nor did they believe in a coming *Messiah*. Plus, the *priests* were the designated teachers, not some backwater know-nothings.

So Peter and John were bucking the system. Not only proclaiming *Jesus* as the Messiah, and that he *rose*, but that we will too. Courage at its best.

V3 – *And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. [4] But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. 5000!* All because they courageously proclaimed the Gospel with great confidence and hope.

Where else would such courage come from? If you're not confident in what you're saying, or hopeful of its impact, you probably won't be very brave in saying it. Or say it at all.

But Peter and John *did*. They shared courageously. Because they had great confidence that God *could* save, and great hope that he *would* save.

So we do too.

1. We share the Gospel with great confidence and hope. (v1-4)

That's the first part of our core value. We share with great *confidence*. Confidence that the Gospel is the power of God to save people from the consequences of their sin. Like the Apostle Paul says in **Rom 1:16** – *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*

We proclaim the Gospel with great *confidence*, whether up front or over coffee, because that's where the *power* is. The power of God to free people from bondage. The power of God to awaken them to faith. The power of God to remove the veil of spiritual blindness.

If he did it with you, can he not do it with others? If he says it, does that not settle it? My mom used to say, “If God's Word says it, I believe it, and that settles it.” May God use that to increase our confidence in the power of the Gospel.

And then share it with great *hope* because God promises to use it. **Is 55:11.**

It [my word God says] shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

That's where the hope of sharing the Gospel is; God's promise to use it. To save 5000 at one time, or plant 5000 seeds *over* time.

If we're going to be courageous in our *evangelism*, we have to have great confidence and hope in the evangel, and share it accordingly. That's the first part.

➤ The second, comes from v5-10.

[5] *On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, [6] with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander [relatives of Annas], and all who were of the high-priestly family.* [These were the mucky mucks.] [7] *And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”* [With what power and authority did you heal the man?]

[8] *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, [9] if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, [10] 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.*

Courageous evangelism means . . .

2. We are not ashamed to name the name of Jesus. (v10)

Especially so, because Jesus himself said, “*Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, I’ll be ashamed of them when I return.* (Mk 8:38) Don’t go there. When a situation warrants it, speak the name of Jesus openly. Don’t hide behind “Lord” or “God” or “him,” or even “Christ.” Just say it. *Jesus.* Jesus.

I don’t know about you, but that didn’t come naturally to me. Nor was it modeled or emphasized in my formative years. I had to *force* the issue. And did so because I was convicted. Convicted by my shame.

So I stood in front of the mirror one day, looked myself in the face, and said “Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.” Out loud, over and over again. Because I knew if I was uncomfortable hearing it, I wasn’t going to say it to *others* who might be uncomfortable.

And there’s certainly a discomfort there, isn’t there? Even offense. Because “there’s just something about that name” as the old hymn goes. It convicts. It’s personal. It’s unavoidable. It’s exclusive. It’s powerful. It’s real. It’s explicit.

If Peter had said in v10, *let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of* “Yahweh, or Adonai, or Elohim this man was healed,” that would have been the end of it. Case dismissed. Even “in the name of the Lord” would have been fine.

But that’s not what he said. Because he wanted to make sure credit was given where credit was due. He wanted to make sure *Jesus* was exalted. Unashamedly.

If we’re going to be courageous in our evangelism and unashamed to name his name, we have to care more about exalting *him* than offending others. We have to care more about the needs of those who don’t *know* him, than we do about the preferences of those who *hate* him. We have to care more about his *love* for people, than our *fear* of people.

So name the name. Say Jesus. It’s who we are and what we do.

➤ Third, comes from v11-12. [11] *This Jesus* [Peter continues] *is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders* [the people God *first* appointed to build his kingdom], *which has become the cornerstone.* [Jesus, the rejected stone, has become the most important stone.] [12] *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.*”

When Peter says that Jesus has become the cornerstone, he’s saying that Jesus is both the *foundation* of God’s kingdom (Is 28:16), and the *pinnacle* of God’s kingdom (Ps 118:22). A kingdom of salvation that can only be entered through Jesus. *There is salvation in no one else . . . there is no other name . . . by which we must be saved.*” (12) In the face of powerful men, Peter held firm to the truth that Jesus is the only way. So we do to.

3. We hold firm to the truth that Jesus is the only way to be saved. (v12)

There was no compromise or accommodation in *Peter’s* testimony or teaching, and there shouldn’t be any in ours. No matter *what* the cultural pressures are. No matter *how* pluralistic and ecumenical things get. No matter *how* sincere your friend is in their unbiblical faith or religion. Hold firm.

And make no mistake, we *will* be criticized for this. We *will* be marginalized. Because it

makes every other religion false and idolatrous. And those who are secular, uncomfortable. All of which will result in more and more backlash, and more and more pressure to live and let live.

Don’t succumb. Hold firm. Because truth is truth. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* [Jesus said]. *No one comes to the Father* [no one is saved], *except through me.* (Jn 14:6) Hold firm because it’s *true*.

And *crucial*. A matter of life and death. *Eternal* life; and eternal death. And hold firm to Jesus as the only way, because contrary to the naysayers, it’s the most *loving* thing you can do. Truth saves; compromise doesn’t. Accommodation doesn’t. So hold firm. It’s who we are and what we do.

➤ V13 – *Now when they saw the boldness* [the courage] *of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.* [It wasn’t as though Peter and John couldn’t read or write, but that theological discussions were thought to require advanced rabbinic training in those days.] *And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. [14] But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them* [standing], *they had nothing to say in opposition.*

They were tongue-tied. Because for once, they perceived things correctly. That Peter and John weren’t formally educated, and followed Jesus; spent time with him. What a compliment; backhanded or not. That their relationship with Jesus, their walk with Jesus, was *that* noticeable.

How about you? Is your walk with Jesus obvious? I hope so. Because it’s a big part of evangelism.

4. We make sure our walk with Jesus is an obvious feature of our life. (v13-14)

We make sure our relationship with him stands out. We make sure our aroma, as Paul says it, is strong and unmistakable. Whether it’s an aroma of death to those who *don’t* believe, or an aroma of life to those who do. (2 Cor 2:15) We make sure to wear our relationship with Jesus on our shirtsleeve; for all to see.

That means we don’t change our speech or behavior depending on who’s around. We talk and act the same out there as we do in here. If we refrain from something around Christians, we refrain from it around non-Christians. If we speak in spiritual terms with other *believers*, we speak in spiritual terms with *un-believers*.

It’s like Jesus said in **Mt 5:14-16**.

[14] “*You are the light of the world* [you burn with the brightness of God’s righteousness and glory and purpose.]. *A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* [If we’re living as we should, *open* before God, everyone will see.]

[15] *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* [16] *In the same way* [like a light for the world, a city on a hill, and a lamp on a stand], *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works* [as an obvious feature of your life] *and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

You know the chorus? *This Little Light Of Mine*? It’s not just for kids. Let’s sing it.

*This little light of mine; I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine; I'm going to let it shine.
This little light of mine; I'm going to let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.******

Part of our core value of courageous evangelism, is that we make sure our light, our walk, is an *obvious* feature of our life. It's who we are and what we do.

➤ And last, we don't hold back. V15-22.

They had nothing to say to Peter and John – *But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, [16] saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. [17] But in order that it may spread no further among the people [it, being word of their miracle and testimony for Jesus], let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."* [18] *So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

[19] 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, [20] for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." [21] *And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. [22] For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.* In other words, it was unmistakable and miraculous.

We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard, Peter and John said. (20) *They couldn't help it, and wouldn't help it.* So neither do we.

5. We don't hold back in speaking for Jesus. (v20)

Because push comes to shove, we can't help it. We can't *help* but talk about all the things Jesus has done. In our lives, in our church, and in our world. We can't *help* but speak of his love and grace. We can't *help* but tell people about him. We're compelled. Busting out. Overflowing.

It's like trying to hold back a sneeze. Etiquette gurus can argue all day whether it's good, bad, or ugly, but at the end of the day you can't help it. When you have to sneeze, you have to sneeze. That's how speaking for Jesus should be.

Have you seen him do a *work* in your life? Speak up. Have you experienced the miracle of his grace and forgiveness? Speak up. Do you have peace like never before? Speak up. Has he restored your marriage? Healed your sickness? Changed your heart? Blessed your life? Blessed our church?

Hold back no longer. Suppress it no more. Speak *of* Jesus and *for* Jesus every chance you get. It's who we are and what we do. And the last part of courageous evangelism in word and deed.

➤ Believing that people are lost, and Jesus saves, we share the Gospel and our lives, courageously and urgently.

Prayer – Father, capture our hearts in this. Overcome our inhibitions, and our doubts, and

our fears. Fortify us to speak up and speak out. Give us an overwhelming desire to share the Gospel, and see others come to know you just like we do.

You Are Loved