Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 4

Introduction
If we learn anything from Acts 4, it is that Christians should not be sheepish cowards when it comes to our faith. The believers of the early church were empowered by the Holy Spirit with boldness. They possessed boldness in their preaching, in their faith, in their prayers, their ability to love and in their giving.

Their experience of the resurrection and being filled with the Holy Spirit gave the early church a mission and a message that could not be kept private. An undeniable sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is boldness. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if we lack boldness, we should search our hearts for the Holy Spirit is likely lacking in us.

Yet in today’s society we find little boldness among Christian people. Because we lack boldness, we miss the opportunities to observe the amazing things of God. Because we lie still in our safe zones and never venture out with the Holy Spirit as our guide and resource, we fail to be astounded at God’s work. Even our churches today scorn their pastors when they preach with boldness and implore them to tread lightly so as not to offend anyone.

This Sunday when you look at the Newsletter, read the results of our Super Sunday and ask yourself if these numbers reflect boldness of faith in this body of believers. Ask yourself if these numbers reflect a family of Christians living by faith and with the boldness of the Holy Spirit. They do not.

Am I disappointed? Yes. Am I discouraged? No. I know God wants to amaze this body of believer. He desires to amaze us and He desires to amaze the world through us. As we study Acts 4, may each of us be shamed by our lack of boldness. May we become thirsty for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and may we be inspired to ask God to give us the boldness of the Holy Spirit.

1. Boldness in the Name of Jesus Christ (vs. 5-19)

Though thousands of people were being saved by the preaching and sharing of the gospel of Christ, there were those who rejected the message and promptly tried to stop God’s plan for the early church.

a. Who arrested Peter and John and why (vs. 5-7)?

The temple was sort of its own little Jewish world within the Roman Empire. There was this fragile balance and existence between the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government. The Romans gave the Sanhedrin which was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, government over the temple since conflicts that would arise were religious in nature rather than civil.

The Pharisees were the nationalistic group who were committed to the preservation of the law and the uploading every little rule and regulation they conjured up to keep their positions of power. They resented the Roman rule but strived to keep a delicate balance of power.

The Sadducees were the wealthy landowners and religious leaders who had the most to lose if the status quo was to be altered. They had this bureaucracy of rule and hierarchy that gave each one a certain amount of power all the way up to the high priest. They wanted no disturbance of the balance of power for they did not want to lose any of their holdings. They did not believe in resurrection and chose to use that as their basis for arresting Peter and John. But in reality it was the threat to their power among the people that was their true motive.
One must not confuse this power hungry activity cloaked in the name of religion with the activities of the church today. Occasionally, I hear someone refer to the Sadducees and Pharisees to criticize the organized church today. If you look closely, there is little resemblance, certainly within the Baptist churches where each church is autonomous. However, we must be careful not to get caught up in bureaucracy and miss our true mission.

b. What did they ask Peter and what was the significance of his answer (vs. 8-12)?

It was the Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin and high priest who had put Jesus to death. They first thought they had Jesus stopped by the crucifixion. Then word broke out of the resurrection. They promptly squashed that with a rumor that His body had been stolen. They wanted so desperately to be rid of this Jesus but now here He was again; with the apostles performing miracles and preaching in the Name of Jesus Christ.

We need to understand the significance of a person’s name in this context. A person’s name represented their power. If something was done by the government, it was done in the name of the Governor or in the name of the king. Hence the question of in whose name were these miracles being performed. In others words, under whose power do you do these things?

Notice the boldness of Peter’s response. He doesn’t hold back and goes directly to their rejection of the Messiah (see Ps. 118:22, Is. 28:16). He knows full well what they did to Jesus and understand his response can bring the same punishment upon him; yet without fear he tells the truth. This is the boldness that comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had previously spoken of this.

11 Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don’t worry about how you should defend yourselves or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said.” Luke 12:11-12 HCSB

Then Peter spoke a most powerful statement that would ring throughout history.

“12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people, and we must be saved by it.”

He spoke the boldness of the name of Jesus and Jesus Only. He said not just that Jesus Saves but Only Jesus Saves. Deliverance, wholeness, oneness, forgiveness – salvation comes from Jesus and can only come from Jesus. The cross was a one-time, never to be repeated sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The world would have us believe all religions can lead one to salvation. That simply is not true. That is a statement of complete stupidity. If you study other religions, you will find no path to salvation and forgiveness, and you will find no evidence of a loving forgiving God. If there were other paths to salvation, why did God have His son crucified? Christ is not an answer, He is the answer!

The growing demise of Christianity in America is because we have lost the boldness of Christ-Only. We have too many Christians buying into the lie that there are other paths to salvation. We need the boldness of Peter to preach and teach and model in our living that there is no other way but Jesus.

c. What was Peter’s response to the threat and instruction to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (vs. 13-19)?

The Sanhedrin ordered Peter and John to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. They wanted this Christ to go away and they thought their threats to Peter and John would make that happen. Peter and John had to decide whether to be obedient to the Sanhedrin or to God.

As Christians, each of us should ask what our response would be today if we were in the shoes of Peter and John. Would we be reminded that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and put Him before
everything else? C.S. Lewis says about a character in one of his novels: “Mark liked to be liked. There was a good deal of spaniel in him.” Without the boldness of the Holy Spirit, there is a good bit of spaniel in us.

Would we negotiate our way out of the circumstance? Would we rationalize a way to stop speaking in His name in order to save our own hides? Or would we sing Paul’s words, “For I know whom I have believed in and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day”?

2. Boldness in Prayer (vs. 23-31)

What strikes you about the pray by the believers?

The decision by the Sanhedrin was a gift from God. The command to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus was a blessing as it solidified the apostles and the church in their courage and commitment. It caused them to turn to the Lord in prayer.

In their prayer, they did not ask for God to relieve them of this persecution but rather they asked for what? More boldness! They asked God not to spare them of the threats but to give them the boldness to speak in the name of Jesus Christ; the very thing that had them in trouble with the Sanhedrin.

When we spend ample time in prayer and seek the filling of the Holy Spirit, we are compelled to play to the right audience. Pressure comes in our life when we lose sight of this and try to please everyone.

But for this body of believers, they sought to please God and Him only. They understood they could not do this by their own might or determination. They prayed for the boldness to do what must be done rather than to be spared of the persecution. Contrast this with our prayers today. We spend most of our prayer time asking God to bless us and asking Him to make life easier on us. We beg Him to spare us of the struggles and trials of this life. One can only wonder what amazing things we would experience and witness if we would pray for boldness to face life’s challenges in the name of Jesus.

3. Boldness in being the Body of Christ (vs. 32-36)

How was boldness displayed in their giving? How can we do that today?

Wherever we are in our walk with Christ, there is always a next step to take. The early church was growing at hyper speed. God was working many wonders in their midst. Not to be overlooked was how the believers responded to love with love. The experience of Jesus Christ compelled them to see the needs of those around them and do what they could to help. Their unwavering commitment was to Christ extended to their fellow believers as well.

Don’t we all want to be a part of a church like this, one where God is working through His people to reach other people? In Luke 5:11 we will see where Luke first uses the word “Church”. But here we see what the word really means. The Greek word for church is “ekklesia” which literally means “a called out and called together assembly.” We are called in oneness to Him. Paul understood this meaning and often used the phrase “the body of Christ”.

The closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another. And the closer we come to one another, the more we feel the needs of one another and the need for the spread of the gospel. Our text tells us: “no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common.”
This shatters our human attitude of “what is mine is mine.” How does this fit into our “only one stewardship sermon a year” mentality? If boldness is a test of the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, boldness in giving must be the ultimate test. Each of us needs only to look at our checkbook to measure our boldness in commitment to the work of the church and the needs of others.

But as much as our sharing of material wealth is difficulty for Christians, there is another aspect of this passage that challenges us; “they had all things in common”. Someone once said, “The handle of the door to our lives is on the inside.” We can only be supportive of each other if we get to know one another on the inside.

As Christians, it is critical that we love one another and know each other intimately. We are taught to love one another more than ourselves. We are instructed to pray for each other and to encourage each other.

One of our Sunday School classes recently got together one afternoon and painted their classroom. The job required two coats and they ran out of paint before getting the second coat around the entire room. They left a small area with only one coat. Another fellow Christian who is not in the class observed the room and announced to those around him, “They did a terrible job, it looks hideous.”

If we are to ever experience the power of the Holy Spirit and see God work in our church, we must be willing and eager to love one another. We must be encouragers and supporters with our time, our hearts and our resources.

**Conclusion**

12 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

John 14:12-14 HCSB

We need to pray for boldness as Christians. How would we act and live if we had the boldness that is given by the Holy Spirit? What would we say? What would we dare to do in the name of Jesus Christ? What acts of love would we show that we have previously resisted? Would we share our faith where we have been embarrassed in the past? Would we reach out and forgive that which has thus far been unforgivable?

If we had the boldness that comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit, what a difference we could make by giving out of faith, trusting God will provide our needs.

God stands ready to amaze us if we will pray for and receive the boldness that comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit. Just this past Sunday, Bill Rogers sang an old favorite song:

Fill my cup Lord; I lift it up, Lord!
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more...
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.

Will you pray and seek the filling of the Holy Spirit? Will you be one of those rare Baptist believers who doesn’t just talk and sing about the Holy Spirit? Will you pray for and allow yourself to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Yes, I know it is scary but with the Holy Spirit comes the boldness to do the Lord’s work and to be amazed by what He will do through you.