

Acts 4:1-31 – Holy Boldness vs. Unholy Persecutors – Sermon Outline

Intro: The wicked leaders against Christ and His Apostles, who have all the power of earthly authority, are outmatched by the power of heaven, Christ's Spirit upon His Apostles, Expressed in bold preaching against the enemies in power, and calling to repentance and faith in Christ the King of all.

Need: We lack bold and clear speech from men of God today, because we lack and are quenching the Spirit, fearing man rather than fearing God. We must pray that Christ would fill us with His Spirit again, to not only proclaim the Truth to those who need to hear it, but proclaim it with boldness and frankness.

Theme: Holy boldness by the Spirit's power overcomes the unholy in positions of power.

1. The powerful Sanhedrin is disturbed by the bold, Spirit-filled preaching concerning Christ. (4:1-4)
 2. Peter and John are arrested and questioned by the Sanhedrin, yet set free as Peter boldly preaches that they crucified Christ, but He is now risen with power to heal and save. (5-22).
 3. The Church rejoices and praises God for delivering the Apostles from evil, and they all pray and receive boldness by the Spirit to speak the Truth and live for the Lord despite persecution. (23-31)
- I. The powerful Sanhedrin is disturbed by the bold, Spirit-filled preaching concerning Christ. (4:1-4)**
- A. The Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, rejected the idea that one could rise from death.
 1. The Pharisees were actually theological conservatives, and some like Nicodemus and others later in Acts 15:5 convert to the true Christian faith.
 2. Christ said in Mt. 23:2 to follow the scribes & Pharisees' teaching, who sit in Moses' seat of authority.
 3. But He also said do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach, and add burdens.
 4. Christ both recognized legitimate authority, and also its hypocrisy and abuse of it, and did so as one with true authority. The Apostles will go and do likewise, with boldness from the Holy Spirit.
 5. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is being preached as the risen and empowering Lord of heaven, and the lame man made to walk did so by Christ's power.
 6. This "***disturbs***" the priests, temple captain (Roman Guard), & others who comprised the Sanhedrin court of judgment, similar to the 70 Elders appointed under and with Moses to adjudicate matters.
 - B. In order to stop the mouths of Peter, John, and the other Apostles, they arrest them in the evening and hold them until the next day, to question them. Yet the Spirit is converting many through the Gospel.
 1. This is a break with the way God has ordered worship with His people ever since Israel in the wilderness with Moses and the Tabernacle, and the animal sacrifices even before that.
 2. We see in 4:4 there are now 5,000 men, not counting their households, who are part of the Church.
 3. Bold preaching leads to bold faithfulness – those who believed knew they, too, could be arrested, or worse, by the religious authorities with the aid of the Roman government – yet they followed Christ.
 4. The Apostles had to continue to preach and live with boldness, so the early church had confidence.
 5. Christ in ***Lk. 21:12*** told them this persecution would be coming, "*they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be **betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.** And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.*" We must be faithful, knowing treachery and burdens may come too.

II. Peter & John are arrested and questioned by the Sanhedrin, yet set free as Peter boldly preaches that they crucified Christ, who is now risen in power. (5-22)

- A. 5-7, The Sanhedrin rulers along with the high priest and others all gather against Peter and John.
1. This is the whole brigade, the powers that be brought out in a show of force. The Sanhedrin usually sat in authority in a circle/"***set them in their midst***", and so picture Peter and John, evidently with the lame man that was healed present, in the midst of this circle, on trial as it were.
 2. Now Christ will give them the words, by His Spirit and their minds open to comprehend all the Scriptures, to answer this wicked court, and to do so with boldness, not recanting/compromising.
 3. They know what "power", v.7, the Apostles have done this by, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but they want them on record saying this, so as to accuse them, even as they accused Christ of blasphemy.
- B. 8-12, Notice we are told Christ gave that fresh filling/help of the Holy Spirit, to boldly and literally speak Truth to power, in the face of danger, preaching the Gospel, now saying the authorities crucified Christ!
1. Peter didn't merely have guts, but guts fortified by the Holy Spirit to say these words in wisdom and courage. Peter who was recently such a coward that he fled from Christ, now boldly stands on trial.
 2. **11**, The word "***rejected***" could be rendered "***despised***", or held in contempt, or something similar.
 3. Peter tells them Christ is that true stone, which YOU builders rejected, but Christ is the head stone.
 4. Christ is Head of His Church, over these builders, who have rejected Him and held Him in contempt and disregard, trying to forbid speaking and preaching in His name, denying the work of the Holy Spirit upon the lame man, etc. Their power is inferior, and they are flailing in anger at the reality.
 5. The quote in v. 11 is from Psalm 118:22. This prophecy as it were has been fulfilled.
 6. **12**, The exclusivity of Christ is seen. The full deity and true humanity of Christ offered up for our sin, that alone could pay for sin, rise to glory, and pour out the Spirit as a gift upon His people. Christ alone is qualified to be Lord and Savior in glory and power.
 7. ***Peter declares that if they stop preaching Christ, they stop preaching salvation***, for it cannot come through any other, and certainly not our own power, but only the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the true man who died for sinners, and is risen to glory, returning in power to God His Father.
- C. 13, The rulers saw Peter and John's boldness as a mark of being a disciple of Christ/born of His Spirit.
1. If we are faithful to the Lord, He will enable us to speak the Truth boldly as well, in His strength.
 2. He will not fail us in the day of giving an account, whether here on earth at the hands of cruel men, and certainly not on the last day of judgment standing before Him. What a great comfort this is!
 3. These disciples were unlearned and untrained, but, they were trained and taught by the wisest teacher, who modeled that truth both in rhetorical skill of speech, and also manly boldness/attack.
- D. 14-20, Seeing this, the Sanhedrin court realizes Peter and John are fearless, the people are being converted, and an undeniable miracle was in front of them all, with this known lame man of over 40 years of age, crippled from birth, walking, leaping, and praising the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
1. As Peter said in V. 9, they were being judged unjustly, for doing a good deed to a helpless man through the power of Jesus Christ, who healed and saved this man.
 2. All in Jerusalem saw this public miracle done, and heard it done, not in Peter's name, not in the name of the Jewish Temple or whatever, but in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.
 3. If Jesus' name evoked could make the lame walk, then Jesus must truly be alive in heaven as well.
 4. Then all Christ had said must be true, and He is crowned Lord of all, this led the people to see their sin, their foolishness in rejecting and calling for Christ to be crucified, and many being converted.

5. The miracles validated the messengers, and so the Apostle's authority as Christ's emissaries is also established here as well. The Apostles spoke now with far greater boldness than they had before.
 6. If we want to overcome evil in our own hearts, families, friends, churches, and communities today, from abortion and transgenderism, to profaning the Lord's day and prostituting the Lord in false worship, to murder and adulteries and envies and strife, we must speak the Truth confidently.
 7. If God's own leaders, in home, church, or state, the men in leadership, are weak and afraid, that will only embolden the wicked, rather than encourage the righteous to take dangerous, faithful stands.
 8. May God give such holy boldness in accordance with God's Word. And may He cut down all the counterfeit, fake miracle workers who claim to heal all but never can prove any healing at all!
- E. 17-22, They are threatened, probably upon physical beatings and imprisonments, to stop speaking about Jesus, stop preaching the Gospel. Peter says no, they will preach what they've seen & heard.
1. Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God. And in their boldness, the people were emboldened and converted, all by the Spirit's power, working through the Scriptures which reveal Christ and His glory.
 2. The people are continuing in the Apostle's doctrine, knowing and loving Christ from the heart, breaking bread together, praying together, bearing one another's physical/bodily needs, etc.
 3. But they do this in the midst of much persecution and storms there in Jerusalem.
 4. The Sanhedrin couldn't punish them, for they would be punished by the mobbing people, and notice in this case this is a righteous thing, that the wicked powers in place by God are fearing the mob.
 5. Sometimes the Apostles speak boldly, and the Lord allows them to be imprisoned, stoned, martyred. In this case, they were delivered, and a great humiliation came to the Jewish court jesters.

III. The Church rejoices and praises God for delivering the Apostles from evil, and they all pray and receive boldness by the Spirit to speak the Truth and live for the Lord despite persecution. (23-31)

- A. Remember the parable of the 4 soils, when persecutions come, the rocky soil stumbles/rejects Christ.
1. In Mark 4 it tells us these have no root in themselves and only endure for a while, but when tribulation or persecution comes for the word's sake, they stumble immediately. Many will do that in our day too.
 2. But here, the people are full of the Spirit, and with one voice stand firm. They call upon God in faith, not fearing the Sanhedrin that threatened the Apostles, and by extension them, to cease from Christ.
 3. 24-28, Their help is in the Lord's name. Do you see why the Church historically has opened its service with calling upon the name of the Lord, our help, who made heaven and Earth?
 4. In Psalm 2, David had said the nations and peoples, the kings and rulers, plot against the Lord, against Christ, and against His anointed bride, the Church. But these plots are vain/empty.
 5. The Sanhedrin court rulers conspired against Christ in His crucifixion, and now are plotting the same against Christ's Apostles and body, the Church, whom He purchased with His blood, filled with H.S.
 6. Christ in John 17 prayed that the Apostles and those who believed in Him through their word would be one, and here we see that living, vital, union with Christ on High, for they are all standing as one!
 7. They praise God, knowing Him from Scripture, even like the Apostles; seeing Jews and Gentiles, Herod, Pilate, Israel, all of them, only did what **God's hand and purposed predetermined to occur.**
 8. **Acts 2:22-24**, Peter declared these very words of God's fore-ordained plan and purpose that His Son would be taken by lawless hands and crucified. Now the Church, those same Jews who did this but were now cut to the heart, repented and baptized into Christ' body, confess the Apostle's doctrine.
- B. Note, The sovereignty of God, His providence penetrating to every last detail, is what gives the Church holy boldness in the face of real and great evil, all this world and the devil can muster.

1. But the death of Christ wasn't a plan B, it wasn't an accident, it wasn't something God had begrudgingly needed to permit to work something else out better.
 2. No, it was precisely what God had purposed, to glorify His Son through His sacrifice, resurrection, enthronement in glory, and one day, His return in holy vengeance, damning sinners and rescuing His people, ushering them into glory eternal with Him.
 3. The glory of God is leading to the doxology of His people, praising Him for delivering Peter and John.
- C. Therefore, V. 29, they can pray to God, "Lord, in the face of the Sanhedrin's cruel threats of prison and torture and death, grant these Apostles, your servants, all the more boldness to keep preaching."
1. They even dare to ask for another sign to them and to others that God's blessing is upon them, that He would heal and do signs and wonders through them, to confirm to all the glory of the holy servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ.
 2. You can read in Eusebius's Church History, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and the like, the incredible signs the Lord did for those who were faithful unto death. Wind blowing away the flames, lions mouths shut, etc. Some still ended up dying, but God showed His favor upon them in incredible ways.
 3. Christ is persecuted when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for we are His people, bride, body. Christ appears to Paul/Saul in Acts 9:4 and says "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?".
 4. Christ had said in **Luke 10:16**, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."
- D. 31, God immediately answers their prayer, such that the whole church, all the people assembled their in corporate prayer, the place shakes, they all now are filled with the Spirit, in order to speak the word with boldness.
1. This isn't a second or third Spirit baptism, but shows we must live by the Spirit, ask God to continually convict and fill us with His Spirit, to serve Him boldly, in word and deed, especially in persecution.
 2. In Acts 2, the Spirit came and all were filled with Him, in Acts 4:8, Peter was filled with the Spirit to speak boldly, and now all the people gathered here are as well, each in their own callings.
 3. Not all became Apostles, but all became emboldened in their callings and occupations to live and speak boldly, without fear, in the name of the Lord, their Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, to fellow Jews.
 4. This would not be easy, for they could be persecuted, the religious with aid by the civil authorities just forbade speaking in Christ's name. Yet the whole Church is empowered, upon prayer, to do so.

IV. **What exactly is this Spirit-wrought Holy Boldness that the Apostles and People were filled with?**

- A. "**Boldness**" / **παρρησία** is first used in 2:29, where Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, says to his fellow Israelites that he must speak "**freely**" to them.
1. If you look at various lexicons, this word **boldness**, or **free/frank** speech in this case, **pareisia**, is defined along the lines of freedom and openness, especially in speech, and speaking with boldness and confidence/conviction. It is taken from the Greek word which means "all", and "speech".
 2. It is literally "laying it all out on the table", speaking openly, freely, and clearly, with all confidence.
 3. There are no reservations in this speech, no circumlocutions, no beating around the bush, not pulling punches, but being straight up and straightforward, **and** doing it with a confident, convicted tone.
 4. It is clear, public, confident speech that the Holy Spirit gives us, without Him we will not speak thus.
 5. We don't like to speak this way, because it is the kind of speech that irritates people, or demands the attention of people, and if we are bearing unpleasant news, or a rebuke, we know it is going to get a reaction, and that reaction may well be anger and vitriol, persecution, rather than conviction over sin.

6. Then the blame game begins. Then we are told to soften our speech, be less pointed, less bold and open and clear. Start mincing words and leaving room for doubts and discrepancies to creep in.
 7. We're told to speak as if your words are a suggestion or opinion, open to a variety or breadth of interpretations, something that is just your two cents, that you can take or leave as you please.
 8. This is what the wicked world wants, this is what our wicked churches want today, to be coddled and soft peddled and told they are as much victims as anything else, and Jesus feels sorry for them.
 9. And this is what we must repent of if this is the kind of Christianity and comfort we want to live in for ourselves and our families today.
 10. Frank, bold, open speech is not the only kind of speech, but it is a necessary kind, and that prophetic voice needs to be sounded from men in their homes, in the pulpits, and in the streets and communities of our land once again. And women need to urge their husbands/leaders to use it.
- B. Such Spirit-wrought speech pleases the Lord, even as it displeases the falsely pious & openly ungodly.
1. It is costly speech, as we see, it cost Christ and His Apostles their lives ultimately.
 2. But it is the speech that moves the world, indeed, the message of the Gospel proclaimed must be spoken *in this way*, to have the full and true saving effect that the Lord intends.
 3. It is this *παρόρησία*, this holy boldness in telling the truth, that turned the world upside down.
 4. Note, it is not simply sort of giving the Gospel basics in a meek and mild and almost apologetic way that turned the world upside down, but the Gospel coming in the speech of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, that slays the hearts of sinners, that cut those hearing in Acts 2 to the heart.
 5. When Peter told them they crucified the Lord of glory, the same Peter who previously was all bark and no bite, but an open coward who abandoned Jesus Christ His Lord and Savior.
 6. It is only this Spirit wrought boldness, which we must all pray for and acquire in our lives, in our hearts, in our words and deeds, that led the unbelieving Jews to gather a mob in Acts 17 and drag out the godly to the rulers of the city, crying out, "*These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.*"
 7. This is the speech that turns the world upside down in the eyes of the wicked, which means it is truly turning the world right side up once again, for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.
 8. Each of you have friends, family members, neighbors, fellow members at church, those you work with, etc., where being bold and witnessing of Christ is needed.
 9. We all need God's grace in these areas, wisdom and boldness to speak the Truth boldly.
- C. All of Acts is about this Spirit baptized boldness of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the Earth.
1. Though this word does not show up again in Acts until the very last verse, Acts 28:31, we see from that that it bookends the entire book of Acts.
 2. Acts 28:31, the final verse and note of Luke's 2 volume account to Theophilus, is Paul "*preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*"
 3. This is true, yet Paul was under house arrest essentially, a prisoner; in 2 Corinthians 11 he lists for us all his adventures through which the Lord brought him and still enabled him to speak the word freely:
 4. *"in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in*

weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" Paul adds that God sent him a messenger from Satan/thorn in flesh to humble him!

5. The Lord will provide for us and sustain us, but we must realize in being faithful, for some, it may be sustained through absolutely crazy trials and hardships, like Paul faced.
6. Could we say that we are truly free to speak the Word, like Paul could, while being under house arrest? This was Paul's confidence in the Gospel, by faith, despite the trials He faced.
7. May each of us, in our particular callings and duties, as man and woman, in our homes, and with our children, plead with the Lord to fill us with His Spirit, to speak the Truth boldly, and to live boldly for the Lord, with the firm confidence He will bless and provide, as He has always done, turning this wicked world around, tearing down the corrupt powers that be, by the power that comes through Christ's name and Christ's Spirit.
8. Begin with your own heart. Preach to yourself against your sins and lusts, and urge yourself on to holiness and good works, confidently rebuking yourself, encouraging yourself, with the words of God. From there be sure to do so with those in your care and authority, and then to the community.
9. If we do this, though we will falter at times in fear, though we will never speak perfectly and sometimes lack all the elements we should have, and though we will be slandered and accused of harming weak consciences and hindering others from coming to Christ, do not be deceived.
10. Those who preach peace, when there is no peace, and speak the truth only softly, hardly preach the truth at all. The realities of sin and persecutors is harsh; the grace of God though is stronger, so speak and live as those free from man's tyranny, and under the Mastery of the Lord.
11. Holy, Spirit wrought boldness is a mighty power of the High King of Heaven, poured out upon His people, so that through us Christ subdues the earth and its rulers for His glory, and the nations of this world, the kings of this earth, will bow the knee to Him. Hasten the day, Lord. **Let us pray.**