

**Series:** What We Need Now

**Title:** "Boldness"

**Text:** Acts 4:23-31

**Date:** November 19, 2023

Starting in 2020, our church leadership began considering ways to deal with a problem related to buildings that are no longer fit for use on our campus. Our properties team went through a discovery phase in which they brought proposed plans for a new building addition on the south end of our campus. At each step of the way we have consistently communicated to the church body through Sunday morning worship announcements and specially called listening sessions. We have also spoken about this project in nearly every one of our quarterly church business meetings.

When our properties team proposed their first building plans several months ago, the feedback from our church led us to alter our project. After plans were modified, our church voted to proceed with paying for the development of a second set of plans. We received those plans a few weeks ago. We were also given a price for the construction on the south end of our campus.

Since we have received plans and price, our properties team has been working to find ways to reduce the overall cost of the project. Also, our Finance Committee has considered a plan for funding the project. Tonight at our quarterly business meeting, that committee will present a motion for us to move forward. In light of where we are in this project, I want to take an opportunity to speak to us concerning some spiritual priorities I feel are necessary at this time. This morning, I would like to share on the subject of boldness.

In Acts 4:23-31, we read of the way the early church prayed for boldness. Prior to the events in Acts 4:23-31, Jesus had given the church his Great Commission (Acts 1:8) and he had ascended into heaven. As promised, the Holy Spirit descended upon God's people, giving birth to the church (Acts 2:1-47). Despite such things, the church was intimidated by those who resisted the newfound movement of faith. Peter and John were brought before local authorities in Jerusalem. They were threatened and instructed not to speak about Jesus anymore. Considering the way Jesus had been put to death by Jewish authorities, one can understand why the early church was intimidated.

Feeling the pressure of persecution, the church prayed for boldness. Acts 4 provides a verbatim record of the prayer:

Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed" —for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out

your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24-30).

The end result of the early church's prayer was a mighty move of God in the hearts and minds of God's people. The church was animated with fresh vigor for representing Christ and sharing God's Word with others (Acts 1:8).

Boldness wasn't just a need for the first-century church. In all generations, God's people need courage in the face of adversity. Our enemy constantly roars, seeking to deceive many and defeat God's people (1 Peter 5:8). Difficulties and setbacks in gospel ministry seem constant. The church's mission seems to go against the grain of the ways of the world.

What can God's people do? In order for the gospel to advance in twenty-first century society, we must seek after courage in the face of adversity. We must pursue the Lord, asking him to fill us with the type of boldness the early church obtained. Without such spiritual strength, we will be weak and ineffective. Our church will make little difference in a world.

How can we obtain the type of boldness the early church obtained? Is there any hope that the modern church might reflect the ancient church, experiencing a wildfire spread of the gospel? Acts 4:23-31 provides insight concerning spiritual boldness. From reading the words of our text, we discover three important realities related to spiritual boldness.

### **1. It is natural for us to be afraid.**

I once heard the word "fear" defined with an acronym. F.E.A.R. was presented as meaning "False Evidence Appearing Real." Indeed, there is a type of fear that is irrational. Many of the everyday, mundane fears we face are rooted in a loss of perspective and a zany apprehension regarding the minuscule stuff of life.

While there is a type of fear that is based on illogical concern, there is also a type of fear that is based on reality. The Israelites certainly had cause for fear when Pharaoh pursued them. David would have been perfectly justified to quake before Goliath. Daniel's friends surely had reason to tremble in front of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Jeremiah likely trembled as he stood before potentates who had the power to throw him in prison. Nehemiah indeed had apprehension in front of Artaxerxes. Mary and Joseph were unnerved by the angelic visitations they received. The disciples were naturally panic stricken by the storm that nearly capsized their boat. Fear is a natural response to adverse life circumstances. None should feel an unnecessary shame over such things.

The early church in Acts 4 had reason to be afraid. Local authorities had recently arrested Peter and John (Read Acts 4:1-3). After interrogating the men (Read Acts 4:5-17), they ordered that they no longer speak of Jesus (4:18-22). Upon returning to the gathering of God's people, Peter and John told of all that happened to them (Read Acts 4:23-24). Hearing about the threats from the authorities, the church cried out to the Lord for help (Read Acts 4:24-30). The fear the church experienced in Acts 4 was not irrational. What's important is how they dealt with their fear.

Though we are thousands of years removed from the events in our text, we have reasons to have natural fear. The task before is certainly great. We have great needs related to our facilities. To make disciples, we need to address critical needs related to our building spaces. The project before us is a large one. We've had challenges with such projects in the past.

Fear in the face of the world is natural in a sense. The early church was gripped with dread when Peter and John were threatened. It is important to note, however, that the church did not stay in fear. Instead, the church prayed about its fear. The early church's response is instructive for us. There is something critical we must learn. The faithful people of God may experience fear, but they don't stay in fear. They pursue the Lord in faith!

As we consider moving forward with a project related to ministry and discipleship in our church, it will be natural for us to have fear. There are challenges ahead. Sacrifices will be required of us. There will be unknowns. We will face obstacles. It will be required for all of us to be committed to our church, to be good stewards of our finances, to give sacrificially and generously, to experience discomfort as the regular rhythms of church life are interrupted, and to press on in the face of fear. Boldness is needed if we are going to move forward in faith!

## **2. We need supernatural courage in the face of adversity.**

Our first point naturally leads to our second — we need supernatural courage in the face of adversity. It is important to note that Christian boldness doesn't wait on the right conditions or circumstances in order to exhibit the courage of the early church. In fact, the reality about boldness is that it involves courage in the midst of a crisis or challenge. It involves an unflinching, forward perspective in the midst of fear.

When the early church was threatened, they felt the temptation to back down. They knew they were prone to renege on Jesus' command to be "witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Perhaps the apostles remembered how they had abandoned Jesus and denied him at his crucifixion. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus had warned the Twelve, saying, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (Mark 14:27-28). Peter denied Jesus' word saying, "Even though they all fall away, I will not" (Mark 14:29). The apostle's confidence eventually turned to cowardice. Before the break of the next day, each disciple turned on Jesus. Mark tells of the way "they all left him and fled" when he was arrested (Mark 14:50).

Perhaps scenes from Jesus' arrest replayed in the apostles' minds when the authorities in Acts 4 ordered them to quit proclaiming Jesus. Maybe they remembered the way they had previously denied their Lord. They surely felt a temptation to be silent, to obey the magistrate's instructions and to not speak of Christ. Fear was a natural response to the threats they received.

In tune with their fear, the disciples prayed. But they didn't just pray a trite, rote prayer. They prayed specifically for what they needed. They prayed for *boldness*! It is worth noting what was involved with the virtue for which they prayed. The Greek word for "boldness" is one that was used of a freedom or confidence in speaking. One has defined it as "freedom of speech, liberty of language, the courageous and unhindered

freedom of speech in proclaiming the word about Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> The New Testament repeatedly uses the word to speak of “...confidence which is experienced with such things as faith in communion with God, fulfilling the duties of the evangelist, holding fast our hope, and acts which entail a special exercise of faith.”<sup>2</sup>

It has often been noted that one of the greatest fears amongst humans is the fear of public speaking. How much more is such fear increased when one is called to publicly share the good news of Jesus? In every age and era of the church, there is a real temptation to shrink back from ministering Christ. As was the case in Acts 4, the world often rejects the message of Christ. This is true because it is a message that exposes human sin (John 3:20) and because it is a message that seems foolish to the human mind (1 Corinthians 1:18).

In praying for “boldness,” the early church prayed for freedom and forthrightness in talking about Christ. Peter and John had previously exhibited such boldness. Acts 4:13 said, “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.” Having heard the threats of governmental authorities, they were tempted to defect from their previous course of action. As a result, they prayed for a supernatural supply of boldness.

The apostles’ experience will often be the experience of every believer. Though the exact details of experiences won’t be the same, every believer of every generation will be tempted toward timid silence concerning Christ. Jesus has called his disciples to be witness (Acts 1:8), but disciples are often prone toward inaction and inertia. The challenges of life in a fallen world keep many from bold faith. Gospel advancement frequently stalls because God’s people lack courage.

As we look forward to a project on the south end of our campus, boldness is going to be needed. Doing something big and great for the Lord in our generation is going to require courage in the face of fear. One of our church leaders recently told me about events related to the three-story education building in our church that was built in 1996. While it was under construction, a group of representatives from the Building Committee, Finance Committee, staff, and Deacons met to receive an update on the construction status and to view interior furnishing recommendations from the interior designer. The project was a \$3 million project. We were not where we needed to be with funding. To finish the building, we needed to take out a \$2 million loan, a large loan for that time with a church budget of less than \$1,000,000.

There was a lengthy discussion in which it was proposed that we not complete the third floor and that we should leave it unfinished with studded walls — no sheetrock, no carpet, no bathroom fixtures, and no lights. After a long discussion, the group decided to move forward in faith, believing that God would provide the necessary funds to make completion of the building possible. One of our church leaders, prayed a prayer similar to this: “God let us be a part of something that cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 236.

<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), [CD-Rom].

be explained by our own resources, our own abilities, or our own wisdom. Let us be part of something that can only be explained by your power and your provision.”

Our church has needed boldness in the past. Boldness is needed now. Nothing worthwhile for the kingdom is done without holy courage. May we be like the early church. May we do what Tabernacle has done in the past. In the face of fear, may we see our need for boldness. If we embrace and exhibit such boldness, the Lord will use us to move forward in faith! He will use us to make a difference in Cartersville!

### **3. We get boldness from Christ within us.**

In response to the early church’s prayer, the Lord gave a supernatural supply of holy boldness. Acts 4:31 says, “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Notice the source of the boldness the church received. They didn’t become courageous through a human initiative or human ingenuity. The Holy Spirit enlivened them with fresh vigor for the things of God.

It is worth considering what was different between the events of Acts 4 and the events related to the disciples’ abandonment of Jesus at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. A study of Scripture reveals that several things had happened between the two events — the resurrection of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus into heaven, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Such things reveal the source of holy boldness — the work of Christ in the hearts of God’s people.

Interestingly, the New Testament elsewhere uses the word rendered “boldness” in Acts 4:29 in relation to Christ’s work on our behalf. The author of Hebrews said, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with *confidence* draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16). The word rendered “confidence” is the same one used for “boldness” in Acts 4:29. John used the same term when he said, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the *confidence* that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:13-14).

As we consider what God wants to do through our lives in our lifetimes, we must understand that boldness to follow his will only come through the Spirit of Christ within us. If we want to be used mightily by the Lord, our confidence can’t be in ourselves, our wisdom, our resources, or our abilities. Our confidence must be in the Lord. John Owen talked about the way the Spirit supplies us with what we need in the Christian life. He said, “It is the Holy Spirit who quickens us to the life of holy obedience...It is to God we must go for supplies of grace through Jesus Christ...We must make every effort throughout our lives to seek for these supplies of grace. We must wait for them in all those ways by which God gives them to us. If we neglect prayer, meditation, reading and hearing the word and attending ordinances of worship, we have no reason to expect any great help.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Owen, John. *The Holy Spirit*. (Edinburg, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), 192-193.

Do you have the boldness the church had in Acts 4? You can receive it through Christ. Have you been saved? Do you know Christ? His presence in your heart through salvation is the first step in developing holy boldness. If you are saved, you may still struggle with Christian courage at times. Realize that such boldness is developed through a close walk with Christ. By being a person of prayer and a person of God's Word, boldness can grow in your soul. As it does, you can be used greatly for the Lord in this world. In addition, if we are all collectively bold together, the Lord can use us to make a big impact for him in Cartersville and beyond.