

"Boldness in Christ Alone"
(Acts 4:1-22)
Pastor Timothy Song
April 30, 2017

(Acts 4:1-22)

¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

It has been mentioned before that this year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. You've heard of the Five Solas. The Five Solas are five Latin phrases that emerged from the Protestant Reformation intended to summarize the Reformers' basic theological principles in contrast to certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church of the day. "Sola" is Latin meaning "alone" or "only" and the corresponding phrases are:

1. Sola Fide, by faith alone
2. Sola Scriptura, by Scripture alone
3. Solus Christus, by Christ alone
4. Sola Gratia, by grace alone
5. Soli Deo Gloria, glory to God alone

We'll be looking into one of these "Solas"... Solus Christus.

What is Solus Christus? What does through Christ alone really mean? I believe we get a good idea from our passage today. So, why don't we open our Bibles to Acts 4:1-22. Follow along as I read...

Read the Passage

Before we get to anything else, let's look at a little context here. In Acts 3, we read a narrative about a lame beggar who is asking for money in front of the temple. Peter and John were walking by and the lame man begs them for money. But what was Peter's response? He says, "Look at us!" That's a weird thing to say. But the lame beggar looks at them: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. ***In the name of Jesus Christ*** of Nazareth, walk." All of a sudden, a lame man who could not walk from birth, stands up and walks. This man is jumping and rejoicing, praising God! The people around recognized the man and Scripture says they were filled with wonder and amazement. This drew a large crowd. And it was in that moment, Peter took the opportunity to proclaim the Good News:

By faith ***in the name of Jesus***, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has completely healed him, as you can all see...Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. (**Acts 3:16,19-20**).

Through this healing, Peter shared the Gospel. Now, we get into chapter 4. The Sanhedrin, which is comprised of priests, rulers, elders, and teachers of the law (Sadducees), were disturbed at what was going on. They were disturbed because Peter and John were teaching the people, but more importantly, they were disturbed because of WHAT they were teaching. The apostles were proclaiming in Jesus Christ the resurrection of the dead. What they were preaching was that only through Jesus can we be saved. And this is at the heart of Solus Christus.

Tim Challies defines Solus Christus as Jesus Christ being the only Mediator. He writes:

Because Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator between God and man, salvation is possible only by His death and resurrection.

And that is THE climatic thesis of Peter and John when we look at v.12:

Salvation is found in no one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. (**Acts 4:12**)

The major issue of the Reformation was that the Roman Catholic Church clouded the Gospel by adding “assistants” and “helpers” into the mix of salvation. Rome preached a gospel of “Jesus and...”: “Jesus and Mary”, “Jesus and purgatory”, “Jesus and the saints”, “Jesus and works [of charity]” Luther and the Reformers cleared the fog by ridding the church of “helpers” in salvation. They preached the Gospel once again in all its clarity: “Christ and Christ alone is sufficient for salvation.” This issue was not just relevant back then. Since our own hearts constantly look elsewhere for salvation, the issue is still before us today.

In today's text, Solus Christus is at the heart. And by looking at Peter and John, there is one thing that is evident in both of them: boldness. Picture being there when Peter and John are walking around healing the lame, boldly proclaiming the Gospel (and even kind of sticking it to the Jewish leaders). There is a strength, courage, and confidence resounding from them. But where does this boldness come from? But, before we answer that question, let's look at two areas in which we see boldness:

1. We see boldness in facing persecution and,
2. We see boldness in their witnessing

So, the first point is that we see boldness in facing persecution. Going back to the text, Acts 4 is the first account of persecution for the early Christians. Peter and John were arrested. And for what? For healing a lame beggar? For teaching in the temple? Usually the response for helping someone isn't imprisonment. This is just the beginning of what we see Christians will have to go through. Persecution and suffering intensifies as we continue to read about the early Church. The apostles are persecuted. Many are arrested. Many are looked down upon and disrespected. Some even were killed for their faith. But this theme reoccurs over and over again. Persecution existed then, and it still exists now. But here's the question: How does one possess the boldness to stand firm amidst facing persecution?

John Calvin writes in his commentary that as soon as the truth of the Gospel appears, Satan sets himself against it and attempts all things to oppose it. But God “furnishes His children with invincible force and strength, that they may stand steadfast and unmoveable against all assaults of Satan, and not yield unto the violence of the wicked” (Calvin, 164). God provided strength and courage to endure whatever hardships came at them.

I was at a conference last year and it was on the Reformation. One of the speakers, I can't remember who, shared a story of a Christian martyr who was translating the Bible into English. He was caught and sentenced for treason and heresy. How was he to be executed? By burning on a stake. When he was given the opportunity to recant and renounce what he believed, he refused. Different kinds of wood burn at different paces. Some wood would burn quicker and others would take longer. The leaders of the Catholic Church decided to give this man a slow death. Honestly, I don't know what I would do... it took over 6 hours for the man to finally die. For 6 hours, he was being burned alive. What would you do? You must be in so much pain. I'd probably be afraid. But here's the amazing thing that I'll always remember about this martyr: He never cried or screamed for mercy. He never tried to get out of being burned to death. What did he do? For 6 hours, until his last breath, he recited loudly the Gospel of Mark in English so that the hundreds of people who came out to watch him die, heard the Good News of Jesus in their mother language. Wow...

Many people like this man remained bold, confident, and courageous in facing persecution. Christians are suffering even today. Consider the underground churches all over the world because Christians are being oppressed: governments are banning churches; bombings in Egypt recently and in other places. Christians are being killed even today. Praise God that we live in a country that allows us to freely gather like this every Sunday! But, persecution exists and will continue. What about you? Have you ever experienced persecution because of your faith? Sure, the examples I gave are quite extreme. But there are all kinds of persecution happening in our lives and around the world.

ILLUSTRATION: Living two different worlds in high school out of fear of persecution and rejection.

So we see boldness in Peter and John as they faced persecution. The second point is that we see boldness in their witnessing. There are three characteristics of a bold witness as seen in Peter and John. (So there are 3 sub-points under boldness in witnessing).

First, bold witnesses are filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 4:8 says, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..." What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? If we look back a couple chapters in Acts 2, we get Pentecost, where Jesus' disciples are gathered in an upper room, waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. As they are praying, the Holy Spirit comes. And what is the result of being filled with the Spirit? Peter proclaims the Gospel, the people around him hear it and believe... three thousand of them. Three thousand! I would say that's quite a revival! It wasn't because Peter was a great speaker or that he did it by his own strength. Only when the Holy Spirit filled him did he have the boldness to stand in front of thousands and share about Jesus. And it is only by the Holy Spirit that allowed these people to believe. John MacArthur writes in his commentary:

All Christian ministry and witness depends on the filling of the Holy Spirit. The passive voice of the verb translated filled shows Peter's yieldedness to the Spirit's control.

Peter did not become filled by lengthy prayer or an emotional experience. The filling of the Holy Spirit occurs when the believer walks in obedience to the Word and Spirit. Yielding to His control releases His power in the believer's life. Peter did not proclaim the Gospel to the thousands by his own strength, but by the Spirit's leading.

The second characteristic of a bold witness is that Peter and John have spent much time with Jesus and learned from Him.

In v.13, it says, "When they [Jewish Leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men HAD BEEN WITH JESUS". When Jesus called His disciples, He didn't look for the smartest, wealthiest, top-class citizens. He sought after fishermen. Men who weren't educated. Society wouldn't have thought too highly of them. They were ordinary men who woke up each day minding their own business. Until Jesus came along. Just think about this for a second: Imagine what it would be like to spend three years with Jesus. You would be with Him 24/7. You ate together, slept together, heard what Jesus was teaching, saw what Jesus was doing. You were eye-witnesses to Jesus being crucified and to His resurrection. I'm sure a lot of doubts that I struggle with, all of our doubts, could be removed if we had that time and experience with Jesus. Peter and John learned so much simply from watching Jesus every day. They weren't perfect. Pastor Jane shared with us last week Peter's failures and mistakes even though he was with Jesus. But it was the time he had spent with Jesus that allowed Peter (and John) to have such boldness in their witness; from approaching the man who could not walk in chapter 3 to proclaiming the Gospel to anyone and everyone. It was the journey with Jesus, the ups and the downs, the successes and failures that taught His disciples.

You may be saying, "Sure, it was easy for them because they actually lived with Jesus, they walked with Him, saw Him physically, but what about us?" How can we spend time with Jesus? Through the reading, meditating, understanding, and application/obedience to God's Word. His Word is what reveals Christ to us. Just like the Jewish leaders made note of the fact that these ordinary men had such courage and boldness, we, too, can make note of when a believer spends time in God's Word.

Why? Because knowing Jesus causes us to respond and bear fruit. The result of knowing Christ is that we desire Christ be made known. So our thoughts, our words we speak, and our actions begin to be transformed and renewed to be a witness of Jesus to those around us, but we cannot be transformed without the Word of God teaching and revealing to us the truth of Jesus and the Holy Spirit empowering us to understand and believe these truths. We must spend time in the Word. We must become students of the Bible. We must spend time with Jesus.

So, we have 1) Bold witnesses are filled with the Holy Spirit and 2) Bold witnesses have spent much time with Jesus and learned from Him. Here's the third characteristic of a bold witness: Bold witnesses testify of what they know for certain.

Believing that Jesus Christ is the ONLY way to salvation and eternal life caused these early Christian leaders to testify to everyone around them about Jesus. The moment they believed in Jesus, they also were called to His mission. And because of their bold witness, thousands of people were being saved. In vv.18-20, after Peter and John are questioned, the Jewish leaders have nothing to hold against them. A lame man who could not walk was healed and that same man was standing right in front of them. They had nothing to say. The only thing they could do was order them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. What is their response?

"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

ILLUSTRATION: Three summers ago. Spending time visiting different parts of Toronto with the purpose of sharing the Gospel to Muslims. Share about my fears of evangelism but also why I was able to overcome my fears → Because I was in a season where I was spending a lot of time in the Word and really wanted to obey God.

There is a direct correlation between our spiritual growth and testifying Christ boldly. Peter and John used their faith and personal relationship with Jesus to strengthen them to be bold witnesses who share Christ at any cost. And because they believed in Jesus, they did not want to hoard Him to themselves. They wanted to share Him so that more people may believe and be saved.

I am convicted and challenged by this. How many times do I quench being a bold witness of Christ to the people around me? Do I have the same heart and yearning for those who don't know Christ to know and believe Him? Does it pain me to know that people are dying each day without ever hearing the Gospel? What about you? Has God placed that weightiness of souls in your heart? I look at Peter and John's example and I'm both encouraged and challenged. Think about it. They even shared the Gospel to the ones who crucified Jesus only a couple months ago. Can you comprehend what boldness they needed to speak with the Sanhedrin? They stood in front of the Sanhedrin and said in v.10:

...then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'

Peter quotes Psalm 118 here where David is talking about how in the name of the Lord, he was able to cut down his enemies. It was in the name of the Lord that helped him and saved him. The Lord was his salvation. He is implying that the Sanhedrin are the ones who have rejected the One God has sent to be the Messiah; the giver of salvation.

Let me take a short aside here. What's the deal with "in the name of Jesus"? The name of Jesus is reference many times in Acts 4 (5 times). Well, there is power and authority in the name of Jesus. In Philippians 2, Paul says that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. Why is this significant? Peter was confronting the Jewish Leaders, who thought that they were the ones who held the right way to salvation, that Jesus is the ONLY authority and power in which we must be saved. The Jewish Leaders taught that the Jews had to go to them and hear their interpretation of the Law and participate in worship only in the Temple (which they control). Sounds kind of similar to why the Reformation happened, no? By using the phrase "in the name of Jesus", Peter is saying that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. "In the name of Jesus" isn't some code that signifies when a prayer is ending. It doesn't help to get a tattoo with the word "Jesus". Some people even use the name of Jesus in vain, yelling, "Oh my..." or "Jesus!" No, Salvation is found in no other name than Jesus Christ. That is the power of His name.

Ok. End of the aside. So, we see boldness in facing persecution and in their witnessing. But Peter and John could not endure the suffering and be fueled and motivated to be a witness of Jesus without believing in what they were preaching and understanding the implications of what they were preaching. They were proclaiming that only through Jesus can we be saved; Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus. So, what is the implication of salvation?

Well, look at our Westminster Catechism this week. There are 3 wonderful words that are explained: Justification, Adoption, and Sanctification. Pastor Peter preached on justification by faith a few weeks ago. Go back and have a listen again to both sermons. Justification is that we are saved by grace, by faith, through Christ. Only by faith in Jesus are we saved. We are made righteous before God because Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Remember the courtroom setting? You stand before a judge and deemed innocent, though you are guilty. This is such a wonderful truth. God demonstrated His love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And this truth by itself should make us rejoice! The doctrine of Sanctification encourages me much as well.

The pastors are reading this awesome book called, *Confessing the Faith* by Chad Van Dixhoorn. It talks about these doctrines. If the image/setting for justification is a courtroom, then sanctification is in a doctor's surgery room. To be sanctified is "to know that the great Physician is at work, to know that our wounds are healing, the disease is leaving, the mortal illness of sin is mortal no longer". The fact that once we are saved, we are justified AND God continues to walk with us and work in us... Praise God! But, it's the doctrine of adoption that always gets me.

The doctrine of Adoption is that just as we were justified in Christ, so too God graciously grants that we will be adopted in Christ. Adoption has always been part of God's plan. Dixhoorn calls it a "package deal". Galatians 4:4-5 says, "God sent forth His Son, so that those who were under the law...might receive the adoption of sons". We are adopted in God's family only in Christ. It is the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who will bring many sons and daughters to glory.

We are justified and are being sanctified. But we cannot fully treasure these truths without adoption. What is the most pleasant thought: being in a courtroom, in surgery, or being a part of a family? We have become children of God. We can call God, Abba Father! Daddy! Our Father cares for us. I've been blessed with a wonderful family who loves me and supports me. When my parents moved to China as missionaries, my sister and I experienced this kind of grace. Though our parents were away, it was like our church community adopted us and took care of us. This is what God is doing when we believe that only in Christ we are saved.

To close, one simple question and application: What does your faith produce? Do you see boldness in your life? Does your assurance of salvation in Christ give you confidence and courage? We must become believers of Christ who live boldly for Him. How can we apply this? Poimea, does your heart ache knowing that there are thousands of people on campus who don't know Jesus? Do we go into our workplaces looking for opportunities to share the Gospel? Have we invited that one lost sheep or someone who doesn't know Christ to church?

After the Sanhedrin release them because they got nothing to try them with, Peter and John go back to their community and report everything that has happened. And they pray this prayer in v. 29-30: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." If Peter and John prayed this, should we not? Pray for boldness. Don't seek out persecution., but when you are persecuted, pray for boldness to speak God's Word. When you have opportunities to witness, pray for boldness to speak God's Word and pray that in the name of Jesus, God's will may be done. Every day this week, ask God for boldness to speak His Word. May we rejoice like the lame beggar who was healed. May we believe like the five thousand people who heard the Good News and saw the power that comes in the name of Jesus. May we always live with joyful and thankful hearts believing that only in Christ alone we have been saved.

Let's pray.