



**Sunday School Lesson for September 25, 2005  
Released on September 21, 2005**

**"The Time for Boldness"**

**Printed Text:** Acts 4:1-4, 23-31

**Background Scripture:** Acts 4:1-31

**Devotional Reading:** Ephesians 6:10-20

**Time:** A.D. 30

**Place:** Jerusalem

**Acts 4:1-4, 23-31**

**1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,**

2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

**3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.**

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

.....

**23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.**

24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is;

**25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?**

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

**27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,**

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

**29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,**

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

**31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.**

### **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to review the account of the first persecution and the response and affirmation that followed.

**Principle:** to teach that fruitful ministry has both rewards and risks.

**Application:** to encourage Christians to take the risks and reap the rewards of boldly bearing witness for Jesus.

### **Introduction**

In *The World Christian Encyclopedia*, David Barrett estimates that just under 70 million Christians have died for their faith during the first 2,000 years of church history. But of that number, 45 million (almost two-thirds) were killed during the twentieth century alone. Barrett includes a map that indicates that a significant portion of the world remains "highly dangerous" to Christians.

As frightening as that may be, it does not even take into account the many Christians who have been persecuted without being killed. Some countries forbid Christian literature. Others deny employment to Christians. Many Chinese Christians have to worship secretly. Even in America some parents refuse to allow their children to be baptized or to enter Christian service. Not to be forgotten are those who are forbidden to read a Bible or pray in a public place or are harassed because of their faith. Paradoxically, it seems that the more "tolerant" society becomes, the more intolerant it is to Christians.

### **Lesson Background**

Last week we saw Peter and John on their way to pray when they were interrupted by an opportunity to heal a man who was crippled. As we will see today, Peter and John would never make it to their intended time of prayer. Jesus warned

His disciples that they would be hated and persecuted as their master had been (Matthew 10:22). Today's lesson records the first known persecution against the church after its birth on the Day of Pentecost. Peter and John had healed a man in Jesus' name. The crowds were amazed and listened as they proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. Those in authority opposed their message, but the apostles overcame fear. The boldness of Peter and John presents a strong example for Christians yet today.

## **Persecuted for Christ (Acts 4:1-4)**

### **1. Who were the Sadducees, and what do we know about them?**

Last week's lesson showed a lame man getting healed, which resulted in a large crowd gathering. Peter took this opportunity to preach Christ and call for repentance. While he was preaching, he was interrupted.

Since these events took place in the temple courts, a number of priests were present. We should note that the Sadducees were also present at the temple. They existed for two centuries, and they took their name from Zadok, the high priest in David's day. Their name meant "righteous ones." They were generally wealthy aristocrats who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in temple affairs. As with the political leaders, the Sadducees were concerned with maintaining their power and prestige.

The Sadducees did not accept the supernatural. They took a liberal interpretation of the Bible, unlike the Pharisees, who took a more literal interpretation of Scripture.

We know that the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a question about his resurrection during His ministry (Mark 12:18-27). Jesus affirmed that they did not know Scripture.

### **2. Why were they particularly concerned with the preaching of the resurrection? (v.2)**

As stated previously, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees were angered when Peter preached that Jesus was risen from the dead. Apostolic preaching declared that Jesus not only that Christ had risen from the grave (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but also that those who believe in Him will be raised as well (vss. 19-23). Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). The Sadducees wanted to silence anyone who accepted and promoted this supposedly heretical teaching. If they didn't, they would have lost control of the masses in the temple.

The resurrection is the central message of the church. It is this message of resurrection that the enemies of the church resist. Jesus' resurrection is the only element that will either prove or disprove the apostle's message. If Jesus is still in the tomb, then all of Christ's teaching is useless. There would have been no reason for the early church to preach salvation, and our efforts of bringing souls to Christ will be a waste of time. But Jesus rose from the grave, and we have a duty to spread that good news to everyone.

### **3. What was the event that led to the arrest of Peter and John?**

As previously stated, Peter and John were preaching the gospel to the crowds. Those same people experienced the healing of the lame man, and they were listening to Peter and John concerning Christ. We know that this angered the Sadducees. As a result, they had Peter, John, and the lame man arrested until the next day. It is possible that the enemies in verse 1 manhandled them as they are thrown in jail. They have performed much good in the land, yet they were being treated like common criminals. Peter and John entered the temple around 3:00pm and were arrested by eventide (probably 6:00pm). It was too late for a trial since it was getting dark. The authorities would spend the night preparing charges and planning their next move while Peter, John, and the healed lame man were in prison.

### **4. Why was the healed man arrested?**

Last week's lesson revealed the reaction of the lame man when he was healed. He was leaping, walking, and praising God (Acts 3:9). He was a walking testimony of the power of Jesus. Not only didn't the Sadducees believe in the resurrection, but they also didn't believe in miracles. The lame man's miracle directs people to Jesus. He knew that Christ healed him, and he was spreading this news to others. The Sadducees wanted to stop the Gospel from spreading at all costs, so the healed man was arrested as well.

### **5. How large has the Church grown at that time? (v. 4)**

Despite the fact that the Sadducees arrested Peter, John, and the healed man, five thousand men came to know Christ at this event. This does not consider the women came to know Christ as well. The church grew rapidly. That is a lot of souls to receive salvation in one event. Today, there are millions of Christians on this planet, but the church still has a lot of work to do. It is estimated that there are 6.5 billion people living on this earth right now. The vast majority of them are **not saved**.

### **Preparing for Conflict (Acts 4:23-28)**

### **6. How did the apostles respond to the charges against them? (v. 5-22)**

Some interesting things happen in Acts 4:5-22. The apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:15) to answer charges. The elders, rulers, and teachers of the law assembled for the trial. Even Annas and Caipas, the high priests who condemned Jesus, were present (Acts 4:5; compare John 18:12-24).

The high priests demanded that Peter and John tell them, "By what power, or what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7). Peter tells them that the miracle was done under the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter reminds them that they had Jesus put to death, but God rose Him from the dead (Acts 4:10).

The high priests could not deny that a miracle occurred, but they refused to believe that it had anything to do with Jesus (Acts 4:14-16). They were determined to stop the apostles from speaking further in that name (Acts 4:17). The apostles stated that they would never stop speaking in their name (Acts 4:20). The high priests

wanted to punish them, but they were afraid of the people. Since they could not agree on their punishment, they frightened them with threats before releasing them.

### **7. What does it mean that they prayed with "one accord" (Acts 4:24)?**

Now their fellow saints heard what happened to Peter and John. As a result, they immediately went to God in prayer. That "they lifted up their voice to God in one accord" means that they were united in prayer and praise to their Heavenly Father. Prayer was indispensable as conflict was inevitable with the growing church.

It is important that we pray for each other as we are doing the work of God. We should be united in our prayer and praise. Everyone has a responsibility to pray for those in ministry work, especially if we are sitting on the sidelines.

### **8. How did the believers address God in their prayer (v. 24)?**

The believers opened their prayer by affirming the greatness and glory of God. He alone is God (Exod. 20:2-3; Isa. 46:9) and is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 8:3). Prayer is communication with God. Prayer is **not** reading a list to God for the things you want him to do. Although that is a part of prayer; it should **not** be the only thing you pray. Jesus taught us that we must recognize God's holiness **before** we ask God for our daily bread (Matt. 6:9-13). Most of us could learn a lot from these early believers.

### **9. Who did the believers quote in their prayer? What passage of Scripture were they alluding to (v. 25)?**

The believers were reminded of what the Holy Spirit inspired David to write in Psalm 2. It seemed as if all mankind and their rulers had conspired against David. So it would be with the Son of David, the Messiah, who is also the Son of God (Rom. 1:3). Since Satan is the "prince of this world" (John 12:31), it is understandable that he would use worldly rulers to attempt to thwart the plan of God to save humanity.

This should remind us of the importance of memorizing Scripture. We have been blessed to have the Word of God in print, and we can study its treasure everyday. Remember that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Those saints had the faith to believe that God would answer their prayer and give them the tools they need to complete his mission. Remember, "without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Heb. 11:6).

### **10. How did the evil actions of men fulfill God's eternal plan (v. 26-28)?**

In the words of this prayer, there were four people or groups responsible for the death of Christ: King Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Israelites. In the sovereign plan of God, however, the decisions of men only accomplished the decree of the Almighty. Inspired by Satan, those who crucified Christ thought they were ridding the world of an imposter, but God was able to take the evil actions of men and use them to save the world (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).

The early church believed in God's sovereignty and His perfect plan for His people. They did not, however, permit their faith in divine sovereignty to destroy human responsibility, for they were faithful to witness and pray."

## **Praying for Courage (Acts 4:29-31)**

### **11. What did they pray for, and what were the results of the believers' prayers (v. 29-31)?**

If some of us were experiencing similar situations, we would pray for the circumstances to cease or for our enemies to be destroyed. However, the believers prayed for neither. They prayed for boldness to witness to others. They prayed for God to give them the power to accomplish the task that He has given them.

Many believers that they would have been better witnesses if they knew more Bible or had different opportunities. However, God expects all believers to witness for Christ no matter the situation. If we ask for boldness, He will give it to us. God will always bring someone in our lives to witness for Christ. We must make the most of our opportunity because it may be that person's last chance to receive Christ.

At the conclusion of their prayer, God answered in a very striking manner, for "the place was shaken." This probably referred to a literal shaking similar to what happened at Philippi (16:25-26). More importantly they received the filling of the Holy Spirit. It was a "fresh" infilling of the Holy Spirit, not a fresh baptism of the Spirit. While the Spirit can be manifest in various ways (cf. 2:1-4), this result was that they spoke God's Words with "boldness" (4:31), which could also be rendered "confidence" or "courage." Let us also pray for such fearlessness.

## **Conclusion**

Peter and John boldly proclaimed the gospel. Five thousand men were saved, but opposition mounted. The apostles were threatened and released. A threatened church cried out to a sovereign God for boldness and effectiveness, and God answered that prayer in a mighty way.

A familiar slogan declares, "No pain, no gain." This certainly can be said of Christians. The pain of persecution and trial is hard to bear, but great things often result for the kingdom. We do not seek but when it comes, we know that God can use it for His glory.

## **Prayer**

Father, many are lost and are dead in sin. Make us bold so that we will proclaim Your Son as the Savior of the world. May our friends and neighbors know of the power in Jesus' name to forgive and to save and to give hope. Give *[list a specific name]*, who serves in a dangerous area of the world, boldness to preach Jesus. In Jesus' powerful name, amen!

**Thought to Remember**

"I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

**Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

As the church expanded, so did the opposition. Stephen was a witness who was faithful to death. Read Acts 6:8 through 7:60 as you prepare for this stirring lesson.

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