

Acts Chapter 4

Welcome back to our Monday Night Bible Study. It is a privilege to share God's Word with you as we study Acts Chapter 4.

Tonight, we will see the New Testament Church begin to experience true persecution, just as Jesus had earlier prophesied would happen to His followers: "I have told you these things to keep you from stumbling. They will ban you from the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do these things because they haven't known the Father or me" (John 16:1-3).

On September 11, 2001, two-year-old Christine Hanson tucked her favorite stuffed animal, Peter Rabbit, under the covers of her bed so that he would stay safe until she returned from her trip to see her grandmother in California. She and her parents would board United Airlines Flight 175 later that morning which would, just hours later, careen into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

Likely unknown to the Hanson family and to most Americans on 9/11, many years earlier an Egyptian and Muslim author named Sayyid Qutb had ventured to the United States and was appalled at what he viewed to

be sin and depravity among its residents. Qutb wrote a book, *Milestones*, which called for jihad against those he considered to be secular Islamists in addition to those in the West, including the United States. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the brains behind 9/11, and Osama Bin Laden, the principal funder and public face of al-Qaeda, were heavily influenced by Qutb's writings and understandings, resulting in Zawahiri's call for the murder of Americans, stating that it was the "individual duty for every Muslim."

Make no mistake, we should understand that al-Qaeda and the extremists in their midst held to the idea that killing Christians meant that they were serving Allah; indeed, it was considered a sure path to Paradise. Bin Laden referred to Christians and Jews as "infidels" and "God's basest creatures." It is a strong reminder to us of Jesus's words that those who kill Christians often believe they are offering service to God.

This practice has continued: 1 in 7 Christians today are persecuted for their beliefs including 2 in 5 Asian Christians and 1 in 5 African Christians. At least 4,849 Christians were murdered last year, another 4,712 detained, and 3,632 Christian churches were attacked. North Korea remains number one in its persecution against Christians, but additional familiar offending countries, including Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, and Iran, are among several others who are notoriously toxic to Christians. Attacks from multiple other religions

such as Islam and Hinduism, and, in North Korea's case, Atheism, are common in these countries.

Ironically, during the Early Church days it was their fellow Jews who often persecuted or killed Christians. This practice continued for a number of decades, leading to Jesus's Letter to Philadelphia: "Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you" (Revelation 3:9).

To help us sort through all this, I pray that you will recall from Chapter 3 that a man lame from birth had been healed in Jesus's name through Peter and John, and then that Peter had boldly proclaimed both the sin of the people and the power and salvation of Jesus the Messiah. Chapter 4 will show us the results of these wonderful acts of God and His people.

So, let's pray and dive right in (pray for Israel, America, Iran...).

Peter and John Arrested

Acts 4:1-4

4 While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, ²because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the

resurrection of the dead. ³ So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men^[a] came to about five thousand.

Peter's sermon in Solomon's Colonnade was interrupted by the Priests, the Temple Police, and the Sadducees who were offended by the preaching of Jesus's resurrection and who were afraid that their authority was being undermined. The Temple Police were Jews who were granted authority by Rome in the Temple area because disputes there were considered religious in nature. The Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection because they could not find it mentioned in the Pentateuch, were religious leaders of a Jewish sect who were much more materialistic and cozy with Rome than you would find with other Jewish sects. Again, all three of these leadership groups were offended and annoyed at this teaching of Jesus's resurrection and were especially concerned about the number of people listening to the Apostles.

It is indeed very sad that those who proclaimed to have been waiting for their Messiah did not recognize the Person of Jesus as the Christ.

Furthermore, it is astounding that the Sadducees failed to acknowledge the very *works* of God – specifically, in this case, the healing of the man who was lame – and it is further alarming that these religious leaders ignored this healing completed through the name of the One they had

killed on a cross. Josephus said of the unpopular and aristocratic Sadducees, “But the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild; and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them.” In other words, the Sadducees did not even like each other and were politically- and authority-driven.

Solomon once said, “Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). The intelligence communities of the United States were often more interested in their own ambitions and pieces of the pie than they were in protecting America’s interest pre-9/11. As devastating as their arrogance was, it is even more pronounced here among the Jewish authorities of Acts 4 who attempted to lead the people *away* from the resurrected Messiah.

These religious leaders arrested Peter and John but simply held them over since it was late in the evening and since the Sanhedrin did not meet at night. Regardless of the arrests, the Scriptures tell us 5,000 men were converted and added to the Church. There is some debate about whether the men in the Church at that time were 5,000 in total or that *another* 5,000 were added to the previous number from the Pentecost Spirit-outpouring, but it is sufficient to say that the Church numbered in the high thousands once women and children were included!

This is a lesson to us and a reminder that the Word of God does not go out void – when we proclaim Jesus and the Spirit draws people to Him, people are converted. This response of the people must have been so very encouraging to the Apostles being dragged off by the same religious leaders who had earlier tried Jesus.

Peter and John Face the Jewish Leadership

Acts 4:5-12

⁵ The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. ⁷ After they had Peter and John stand before them, they began to question them: “By what power or in what name have you done this?”

⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders:^[b] ⁹ If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy. ¹¹ This Jesus is

**the stone rejected by you builders,
which has become the cornerstone.^[c]**

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

This passage notes the first of four groups of Apostles mentioned in the Book of Acts to appear before the Sanhedrin, with Peter and John being first here in Chapter 4, then the Twelve Apostles, then Stephen, and finally Paul.

The Sanhedrin was comprised of seventy-one men considered to be the “wisest and best educated men in Israel.” The High Priests, the twenty-four Chief Priests, the Scribes, and both the Sadducees and Pharisees were included in this religious council. The Sanhedrin’s authority ebbed and flowed based on the Herodian king in power and on Rome’s willingness to allow its influence.

During *this* season, the High Priest’s office was thoroughly political, and Caiaphas was serving in this role. However, Annas, Caiaphas’s father-in-law, seemed to wield the real power during this time. Annas was the one who led expanded commercial activities within the Temple area, something Jesus obviously disapproved of given that He overturned the merchant’s tables on two occasions during His earthly ministry.

These people considered Jesus to be a threat. They subsequently asked Peter and John, “By what power and in what name have you done this?”

To best answer this question and its corresponding answer, we must first remember what Jesus said to the Apostles about their future trials, “But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, because it isn’t you speaking but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you”

(Matthew 10:19-20). We then see a *fulfillment* of Jesus’s prophecy here in Acts 4 when Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, boldly asserts that the healing of the lame man was the result of the power of Jesus’s name.

What a difference a few weeks and the power of the Holy Spirit make: here is the denier, Peter, now *boldly* proclaiming the Messiah to the previously most influential Jews in the Nation of Israel. Then bold Peter took it even another step when He reminded the Sanhedrin that it was *their* decision to crucify Jesus and quoted Psalm 118:22 to support his point: Jesus had become the Chief Cornerstone, and these unwise builders had rejected *Him*. And then, finally, Peter spoke the truest words in all existence: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

Abraham cannot save. Moses cannot save. Buddha cannot save.

Mohammed cannot save. Krishna cannot save. Jesus – and Jesus alone – has been granted all authority to save people. This is the Good News – that Christ came to save all people. Some, like most of the religious leaders of that day, may reject the offer of Jesus, but *all* are called to the

Cross of Christ. Jesus personally said that *the* way to the Father was through Him (John 14:6-7).

It is astounding to see the results of this message delivered through Peter.

The Boldness of the Disciples

Acts 4:13-22

¹³ When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ After they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, “What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign has been done through them, clear to everyone living in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But so that this does not spread any further among the people, let’s threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again.” ¹⁸ So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹ Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰ for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

²¹ After threatening them further, they released them. They found no way to punish them because the people were all giving glory to God over what had been done. ²² For this sign of healing had been performed on a man over forty years old.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Sanhedrin was a bit dumbfounded. They recognized that these men were disciples of Jesus, and they also recognized that they were empowered in speech far beyond their known education. How sad! Peter and John may not have been formally educated, but they were certainly educated by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The men of the Sanhedrin truly missed the significance of these truths. Additionally, there was no arguing that a formerly lame man was standing in front of them completely healed! Just as when the enemy was silenced before Jesus after tempting Him three times, the Sanhedrin was awed by the power of God, the boldness of Peter and John, and the clear testimony of the healed man. The Sanhedrin was largely mystified at this turn of events, although we might assume that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, secret followers of Jesus at that time, were in the Sanhedrin on this occasion and perhaps recognized the significance of these events.

In any case, the Council quickly deduced that they needed to host a private conversation and invited Peter and John to temporarily be removed from their midst. The Sanhedrin correctly ascertained that a

“great sign” had been done – it’s hard to deny a man who had been disabled for more than forty years but now was standing! – and determined instead to threaten the disciples about their speaking in Jesus’s name.

Peter and John were quite obviously filled with the Spirit and thus emboldened to speak and they quickly replied that they could not help but to speak in the name of Jesus. *This* is the Gospel Commission: we should *also* speak the name of the One who saved us! As the great Dave Earley once said regarding the Christian: Evangelism “is the real business of life.” Paul also said it well, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God’” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

It should be noted that Peter and John, both Jews, were not being disrespectful by their response to the Sanhedrin; instead, they were simply stating – through the power of the Spirit – that they *must* repeat the things of Jesus that they had personally witnessed. After receiving further threats from the Sanhedrin, the Apostles were released.

Prayer for Boldness

Acts 4:23-31

²³ After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they

heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, “Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant:^[d]

**Why do the Gentiles rage
and the peoples plot futile things?**

**²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers assemble together
against the Lord and against his Messiah.^[e]**

²⁷ “For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

I absolutely love the response by the Apostles and the Church after Peter and John reported what had occurred to them while they were before the Sanhedrin:

- First, they acknowledged that God is the Creator by quoting Psalm 146:6, revealing God as the Sovereign LORD and the Church as His servants.
- Second, they acknowledged David's prophecy regarding people revolting against God in vain, quoting parts of Psalm 2.
- Third, they prayed for boldness to speak the name of Jesus.
- Finally, they prayed for signs and wonders to be performed in the name of Jesus.

The Early Church had learned much, and this great prayer was evidence of how much they had learned through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the signs (miracles and spiritual gifts) in the name of Jesus, and through their new understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures when acknowledging Jesus as the *preordained* plan of God. Just think – those who *had been* seeking a Messianic *Earthly* Kingdom were now being shown by the Spirit that Jesus came to establish an *Eternal* Kingdom!

Let's look at the initial results of their prayer and of God's divine power: they were shaken, filled with the Spirit, and spoke the Word of God boldly! Now, there are *some* scholars who believe only this group of five thousand were filled with the Spirit here, but neither the context of the event nor the Greek language used here support such a thought: this was, instead, a *fresh* filling of the Spirit on all who were there. I believe this is indicative that we can receive fresh anointings – fresh fillings – of the

Holy Spirit continually. This “shaking” was not an earthquake, but instead a “mighty move of God.” The Church *asked* for boldness in Jesus’s name: they *received* boldness through the Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son. And once the Holy Spirit moved, oh, what a change in the Church took place:

All Things in Common

Acts 4:32-37

³² Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. ³³ With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles’ feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Any good pastor would tell you that if the church they serve has one heart and one mind in the Lord, *anything* is possible. When Christians are full of the Spirit and have one heart and one mind, we generally do

the *opposite* of what we would *normally* do: Spirit-filled Christians go the extra mile, think of others first, seek to give rather than to receive, and live out the Sermon on the Mount by the anointing of the Spirit. That is what the Early Church was like after the Spirit's anointing. And look at what happens in the Early Church:

- Material possessions did not mean as much to them as they previously had – they considered their possessions to be of use for God and His Church.
- The Apostles, with great *power* from the Spirit, continued to share the Name of the Resurrected Christ. They *boldly* shared God's Word and the Message of Jesus Christ. As Earley said, it reminds us that "The Great Commission has always been the heart of God."
- They experienced great grace *from* the Lord and *with* each other. They didn't assess costs associated to meeting needs – they simply and obediently held God and others in greater esteem than themselves, through the Spirit living out The Great Commandment (see Matthew 20:34-40).
- They collectively sold items and homes and goods and gave to the Church for the purpose of distribution to the needy. We know that this practice continued in many Jewish circles too – the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that the supervisors of charity still distributed funds many years later. As an aside, this account is not a call to

socialism but instead a call to graceful giving and sharing as the Lord leads. We will talk more about this in Chapter 5.

Then look at what happens to the individual heart: Barnabas the Levite sold a field and gave it to the Apostles. There is much to be said by this individual statement, but let's consider just a few things:

- All church revivals start with individual people being saved by Christ, being committed to serving God, and being filled by the Spirit. It is evident that Barnabas made a *real* commitment here – Levites were not supposed to own land according to the Law, and Barnabas proved willing to give up a plot of land.
- Barnabas, mentioned twenty-three times in Acts, was known as the Son of Encouragement, a role he would especially play later during his missionary journeys with Paul, and later, with John Mark.
- Although there are some scholars who contend that Barnabas was the Rich Young Ruler who earlier had walked away from Christ, there is no explicit biblical evidence to support such a view.

Instead, the focus here is on a changed heart. It seems obvious that the Holy Spirit, through Luke, is setting us up for the next part of the Acts story in Chapter 5 in which we get compare-and-contrast perspectives between Barnabas's change of heart and that of Ananias and Sapphira.

Mostly though, I believe Barnabas is an example of how Christians are to approach our giving: submissively, with humility and trust in Christ and in those who are responsible for distributing the proceeds. Barnabas had the kind of heart I want to have.

My questions for us tonight as we end Chapter 4 are these: What are our hearts like? Are we praying, individually and collectively, for the Holy Spirit to fill us – to anoint us – for the betterment of Christ’s Church and for the benefit of His Great Name? Most importantly, are we – as Earley so ably said – sharing the Good News of Jesus’s resurrection with passion and confidence?

Pray.

Acts 4 Sources

Bock, Darrell L. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Earley, Dave and David Wheeler. *Evangelism Is...How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence*. Nashville, TN: B& H Academic Publishing Group, 2010.

Ger, Steven, Mac Couch and Ed Hindson, eds. *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series: Acts: Witnesses to the World*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004.

Horton, Stanley M. *A Logion Press Commentary: Acts*. Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2001.

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Merida, Tony, David Platt and Daniel L. Akin, eds. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Acts*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017.

Open Doors. "The 2026 Watch List." Opendoorsus.org. Accessed February 27, 2026. <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>.

Scheuermann, Rochelle. "Seen, Known, and Invited: How Doing Ministry With And Among People With Disabilities Reveals the Kingdom Of God." *Outreach*, March/April 2026, 68-74.

Wax, Trevin K., ed., and Stanley E. Porter. *CSB Study Bible*. Nashville, TN. 2017.

Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011.

Zuckoff, Mitchell. *Fall and Rise: The Story of 9/11*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2019.