

**Week 6 - 4:1-21**  
**Spirit-Filled Witnesses**

Good morning everyone, how we doing? If you have a Bible, we'll be in **Acts 4** today. And so far in the story of the early church, things have been going semi-well for the disciples. In Acts 1-3 everything just seems to be poppin left and right. You've got the Holy Spirit descending like fire, you've got people speaking different languages all of a sudden, literally thousands of people coming to faith in Jesus in an instant. Just lots of high fives and fist bumps going around.

But last week we alluded to the consequences of what it means to follow Jesus, this week begins a few weeks of what happens when following Jesus doesn't go the way we expect. There's a radical shift that happens starting in chapter 4.

**To give us a recap** of chapter 3 and what was read for us in chapter 4 - Peter and John heal a man who was unable to walk since birth. The man is 40 years old, outside the temple, and all of a sudden Peter and John heal him. He's able to walk now and he runs into the temple worshiping and jumping up and down. And this causes a huge commotion with everyone in the temple. So everyone rushed upon Peter and John to know what's going on and they use that moment to tell everyone about Jesus, and how it's through His power that He healed the man, and that Jesus has been raised from the dead - so turn from your sin and follow after Him now.

And **verse 4** tells us exactly how many people come to faith in Jesus because of this: 5,000 people. This is arguably the largest altar call in the Bible.

Now the Jewish priests, who were the religious leaders of the day, catch wind of what's going on and they don't like it one bit:

**Acts 4:1-3**

the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, **2** greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **3** And they arrested them

The religious leaders were greatly annoyed. So much so that they arrested them. And you have to be pretty annoyed with someone to throw them in jail. But there was actually a couple of reasons for this:

**The first reason was spiritual in nature.** These Jewish leaders rejected that Jesus was the Messiah because He didn't meet all of their expectations. He refused to play by their rules and build an earthly kingdom resulting in Israel's sovereignty and freedom from Rome. They were embarrassed by the people Jesus associated Himself with, and infuriated at Jesus' calls for them to repent of their self-righteousness and trust in Him. They hated him so much that it led to them falsely accusing Jesus and literally having Him murdered.

**Secondly**, they also have a **political reason to hate** what is happening here. **Here's what I mean by that:** the Jewish religious leaders at that time were put in place by Rome to pay taxes to Caesar and you have to swear loyalty to him and call him "Savior" and "Lord" of the Empire and obey whatever he says, **and in exchange** the religious rulers could peaceably live in Jerusalem and rule their nation according to

what the Old Testament prescribes. And so you get Peter and John going to their temple and saying things about this guy named Jesus, and **that He is Savior and Lord** and they're seeing thousands of people become Christians, that for these Jewish rulers it sounds like some sort of uprising. They are asking questions, "Hey what's going on here? Is this some sort of political movement? I thought we stopped this Jesus movement a couple months ago?" Because they know, if this thing keeps getting any bigger, the nation might be thrown into chaos. And if the nation is thrown into chaos, then Rome might come in and remove them from power or wipe everybody out and that's the end of the Jewish people.

**So starting in v.5**, Peter stands before trial before these guys and one very big detail in this is he's on trial the exact same place that Jesus stood before trial, right before He gets sentenced to death. And Peter, filled with the Spirit, in that moment shows them from the Old Testament how Jesus is not an invention or a new idea here to disrupt the Jewish establishment, rather Peter is saying that Jesus has been predicted and prophesied about in their Bibles all along.

And what's interesting to note here, just to remind us, is this is Peter we're talking about who's giving this sermon. The.. Peter. **Until the book of Acts, the guy does not have a great track record.** If you look earlier in the New Testament in the Gospels, he's the guy who if he grew up in South we would say, "Oh bless his heart." In the words of *Hamilton*, he's the guy who sometimes gets a little over-excited and shoots off at the mouth.

- He says some bold things. Like in **Matthew 16**, "Jesus we know you are the Christ!" to which Jesus gives him a thumbs up, but later on in that same chapter Peter says something to Jesus to which Jesus turns around says to him, "Get behind me Satan!" Not a great track record. If Jesus were to call you any name, I think Satan might be the worst one, imho.
- Peter's the guy who says during the Last Supper in **Matthew 26**, "Jesus I would die for you before I ever denied you" and yet in the same chapter - Peter denies Jesus three times, once to a young girl.

**So my question is - how on earth do you go from that to what you see in Acts? How do you go from a scared, fearful disciple to a bold courageous witness talking about Jesus?**

Just to show you what I'm getting at here, we see his boldness come across in the middle of his sermon in v.12:

**Acts 4:12**

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Which, when you think about, is one of the most offensive things he could have said to these guys.

- **For one**, it was incredibly offensive to the Jewish leaders because he's saying they rejected Jesus - these Jewish leaders got it wrong. And Peter is not afraid to step on some toes and say your whole belief system is not as coherent as you think it is.
- **And two, what Peter says in v.12 is offensive in the wider scope of the culture.** You see at that time, as I mentioned, Jerusalem was part of the greater Roman Empire. And in the Roman Empire, you had to worship Caesar as the ultimate god, but from there, there were many gods you

could worship. You could worship Jupiter, or Pluto, or Vesta or any other sort of god. It was a real pick-and-choose situation - you find whatever god is best for you to suit your way of life. So say you want romantic love, have you tried worshipping Cupid? Or say you want to grow in wisdom, have you also tried worshipping Minerva? Whichever one suits your fancy. Whatever's your truth.

So when Peter says Jesus is God. That wasn't particularly the bit that got them in trouble. Because Rome had many gods. And if Peter just went with the flow and said, "Hey I've gotta new god for you to add to the collection, his name is Jesus," most people would have probably not batted an eye. They probably would have said, "Oh that's great. Yeah you worship whoever you want to, if that's your truth, then whatever works for you, that's great."

**No what got Peter in trouble was saying that Jesus is the only God.** He says salvation is found in no one else. No one else is going to save you. No one else is worthy of your worship. Not Jupiter. Not Cupid. Not Minerva. And definitely not Caesar - Jesus alone is the only one worth your time. Those other gods are empty and can't deliver on what they promise. Only Jesus can do that. Peter here is making an exclusive claim on what is actually true.

**Which, you gotta step back and ask, honestly, isn't that an arrogant claim to make? Really? Jesus? The ONLY one. You sure about that?**

**Can you think of anything more unpopular to say back then? Can you think of anything more politically incorrect? It's no wonder why this message got them into so much trouble.**

But the truth is, Peter's message back then is just as offensive as it is today. If you tell people, "Hey I follow Jesus," most people, especially in this part of the country, might say something, "Oh hey that's great. Whatever works for you, I think is awesome." But if you say, "Well I follow Jesus, and I'm convinced that He is the only way to know God, He's the only way to eternal life, that He's the only one worthy of worship," at the very least you might be met with some strange looks. And at most, you would be labeled arrogant, or intolerant, or narrow-minded.

People will say, you can't insist that your is the only way. To do that would be to claim that you're smarter than everyone else or that you're somehow better than everyone else because by saying your way is the only way is to imply that everyone else's way of worship is wrong. And the cardinal sin here is telling someone they are wrong.

To which, Luke, the author of the book of Acts as though he's predicting these very objections makes sure to go out of his way to describe Peter for us - is Peter claiming that he's smarter than everyone else? No not really. In fact Luke wants you to know very clearly he's not. Look at v.13:

**Acts 4:13**

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men

I don't know about you, that seems like a weird dig. It's funny. But weird. Luke is saying about Peter, to quote the modern prophet Smash Mouth, "He ain't the sharpest tool in the shed." Peter didn't have formal training, he didn't go to seminary, he didn't do TED talks. Nothing like that.

Luke, the author, also wants to let you know that Peter in no way thinks he's better or more spiritual than everyone else either. We saw that in **Acts 3:12**

**Acts 3:12**

Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?

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**So if it doesn't come from religious snobbery, where does Peter's boldness and conviction come from?**

**I'd like to point out 2 reasons for Peter's confidence that we see in the text.**

**1 - Jesus physically rose from the dead (vv.19-20)**

**Acts 4:19-20**

But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

And what did they see and hear? The physical resurrection of Jesus. They heard and saw Jesus crucified upon a cross, bloody and dead, stuffed into a tomb - and yet - three days Jesus shows up, alive and well, proclaiming the kingdom of God is here. They heard and saw Jesus, in his resurrected body, for the next 40 days training them up on how to be on mission when He's gone. They heard and saw Jesus, physically risen from the dead, promise that the Holy Spirit will come and empower them and then they see Him ascend into the clouds. And this same physically, risen Jesus - what does He tell Peter and the rest of the disciples to do? Go. Make disciples. Tell everyone about me. And when you do, my kingdom will spread. This resurrection life that you physically see and hear from me, will be granted to you and to everyone you tell about me, so go.

So when the religious leaders tell Peter to be quiet about Jesus, Peter's really quick to say, "Hey look guys, I hear what you're saying. I really do. But I don't have that option. I know what I saw and I know what I heard. Jesus actually came back from the dead and He told me to tell people about Him and He told me there's salvation in no one else. So do whatever you want to me, I'm gonna go with the guy who walked out of the tomb."

And over and over in the New Testament it is that same refrain - if Jesus is who He says He is, and He actually, physically rose from the dead - then that's it. That's the end of the discussion, I need to go with Jesus on this one yall.

Paul, a later disciple of Jesus who we'll look at later in Acts puts it as bluntly as this:

**1 Corinthians 15:17-19**

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In other words, if there is no resurrection, then there is no hope. Sin and death are the end of the story. If Jesus didn't really raise from the dead, then He was making all that up and we should stop what we're doing, we gotta shut this whole Christianity thing down. Close the church doors. If Jesus didn't really raise from the dead, then we should avoid being persecuted for our faith - because what's the point? We should avoid suffering and pain at all costs because this life is all there is.

I had a friend of mine, who had someone once ask him something like, "Hey what would it take for you to stop being a Christian? What would it take for you to renounce this whole thing?"

And to this person's surprise, my friend didn't say anything about if we had concrete evidence of aliens. Or if we knew about the real age of the Earth or anything like that. No, my friend was really quick to say, "honestly the one thing that would make me renounce all of this would be if we found the dead body of Jesus and it was proven to be Him." If that were to happen and we had the proof of that, I might walk up on stage next Sunday and say, "Welp, it's been real yall, who wants to go get brunch?"

And yet, notice the effect that the resurrection has. Peter was radically different after seeing a dead man walk out of a tomb and then ascend up to Heaven. If Jesus physically rose, thus proving He is who He says He is, then He gets to call the shots now. Not me. Whatever He says I'm rollin with.

To think about it another way, one pastor says when he talks to non-Christians about Jesus, this is always where he starts. And people will want to ask him, "Hey why does the Bible say I can't do this. And why is this or that in the Bible." And this pastor will walk them through their objections but after a bit he'll shift the focus and say something like, "Hey I actually don't think that's the most important thing you could be focusing on. Instead I would encourage you to focus on answering the question, 'Did Jesus really raise from the dead?' Because if he did not raise from the dead, then what are we doing even asking about your problems with Christianity. But if the answer is yes, then who are we to argue with Him? If he rose from the dead, then that has all sorts of implications on our lives.

Now a quick plug: we did a sermon awhile back on all the historical evidence for the resurrection, we've got a ton of helpful resources out there as well - that sermon, along with recommended books and articles will be online on this sermon's page later today so check that out if you want to dive more in on that. But to really cut to the chase of all that research here's the summary of it all: the majority of historians and scholars, both Christian and nonChristian, unanimously say that Jesus was a real person, that he actually died, that his tomb is empty and his body was not found, and that his followers all said he rose from the dead and gave their very lives for it in the process - never once going back or doubting that they saw Jesus physically raise from the dead. And people for the last 2,000 years have tried to discredit this fact, but no one has been able to do get anywhere close. But those are the facts that we have. And I don't know about you, but when you look at it like that, **it's almost like, the logical conclusion is: Jesus actually rose from the dead.**

So yes, saying Jesus is the only way may give you strange looks, and it may come with significant social costs, and you may very well be threatened for your life one day like you see in **Acts 4**, but Jesus says He is the only way and He rose from the dead, so we've gotta go with Jesus on this one.

And yes, people might accuse you of saying that's being intolerant and bigoted to insist your way is the only way, in which case, we would say, "I'm just trying to be faithful to Jesus, and if He came back to life, I'm on his side."

And if people say you're implying that you're smarter or better than others by insisting on that, you can say, "Hey I will be the first to tell you I don't think I'm smarter or better than anyone else at all. Come to my LifeGroup and you'll hear a bunch of us confessing sin, admitting to the fact that we don't have it altogether one bit. In fact, I follow Jesus who says I couldn't save myself. And that I was so sinful, and broken, and messed up, that the only way for God to save me was that He had to send His Son to die for me and conquer death. That's how messed up I am. And at the same time, I'm also so loved beyond my imagination that Jesus was glad to die for me, that's how loved I am. And I'm not trying to show I'm better than you because the truth is, you can get in on this too. Because when it comes to the message of Jesus and His people, everyone's invited and welcomed to enter into the kingdom of God - to be forgiven of their sin, to join this family that loves each other so much because Jesus loves us."

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## 2 - Jesus actually changed his life (v.13)

You see, Peter's life is living proof that Jesus is Savior and Lord. Jesus, post-resurrection transforms his life and restores Peter. The power of God, through the Holy Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead, now is powerfully working and transforming Peter bit by bit.

And that's why, even in the midst of Peter's trial before the religious leaders, they recognized he's not educated, that he's not "powerful" in the traditional sense, but here's what they do recognize:

### **Acts 4:13**

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

What a dope line. These religious leaders may not have agreed with Peter, they may have even hated Peter for the message he was saying, and yet, they could not deny this glaring proof standing right in front of them: he had been with the resurrected Jesus. There was a power so beyond him, there was a transformation that happened in his life, that the only possible explanation was that Jesus changed Peter from the inside out.

And in this one verse we see something pretty significant about what it means to live life on mission, no matter what: is that even if people disagree with the message of Jesus, and if people don't like the message of Jesus, one thing they can't deny is a life transformed by the power of Jesus. Michael Green in his book *30 Years that Changed the World* puts it like this:

### **Michael Green, *30 Years that Changed the World***

Often two minutes of honest testimony, the more broken and unschooled the better, is worth twenty minutes of eloquent discourse by some silver-tongued preacher. The early Christians knew this. They were not all preachers, but they were all witnesses. And they expected every Christian to have something to say about Jesus and the difference that Jesus makes to life. And where that happens in the world today, the church grows and people come to faith. People can see that it makes a difference to Mr and Mrs Ordinary Citizen — and they take notice.

This is what's true of Peter, and for those of us who follow Jesus, dying to ourselves daily, this is what's true for us too. There is an undeniable power in a life changed by the message of Jesus. There is power

when the Spirit takes a hold of your life and you begin walking with Jesus and over time you find in yourself new desires that weren't there before to love and serve others. There is power when Jesus takes a hold of your life and you find your sin, or your past, or addictions no longer have the same grasp over you like it once did. There is power when the Spirit transforms you over time to be a person who was once filled with doubt and insecurity, and now you're a person who has a humble, Christ-centered confidence. From a person of worry to a person of joy. From a person of shame and guilt and now you're a person of peace and purpose.

Michael Green says Two minutes of honest testimony, the more broken and unschooled the better, is worth twenty minutes of eloquent discourse by some silver-tongued preacher. That's great. Now full disclosure I'm not the most eloquent - I quoted Smash Mouth earlier, and tbh I'm pretty proud of that one - and I'm not even sure what silver-tongued means. But, don't miss what he's saying here - he's saying your two minutes of witnessing to a friend how Jesus has saved you, is often going to be more effective than me getting up here to teach. That idea comes straight out of **Ephesians 4** that basically says that the work of pastors is to equip you all to be witnesses. Meaning, my job here on Sundays is I get to teach the Bible and I love it and the goal is so for you to become witnesses bearing testimony to Jesus and how He's changed your life. This has always been the plan, ever since the risen Jesus looked at His disciples and said "You will be my witnesses."

So when we see baptism stories week after week, there is such a power in that. We're witnessing miracle after miracle take place when people talk about how Jesus saved them.

AND...when you go into LifeGroup this week and talk about what Jesus is teaching you now through His Word, there's power in that. And when you confess sin and repent day by day, there is power in that. And slowly over time, when we step into this pattern of life that Jesus has designed for us in His Word - we allow the Spirit to shape us more and more into a person of power.

Now I'm not saying you shouldn't spend time studying theology, and learning apologetics and reading deep books to answer people's questions when they have them, I think that's all well and fine and for what it's worth we've got some great resources on our website for all of that ... but what I am saying you shouldn't feel like you have to be able to answer all of the questions and read all the books before you can really be an effective witness for Jesus.

So as we wrap up our time, I just wanna leave you with two quick questions:

**1. Do you have anything to say about Jesus, and the difference He makes in your life?**

For the religious leaders, they saw Peter and recognized he had been with Jesus. I wonder - could people say the same for us?

I wonder, do we have space in your mind, with all the other things that vie for your attention, to remember the most defining fact of our existence is that Jesus defeated sin and death, making a way for us to live forever with Him? Don't let that get crowded out with interests, hobbies, obligations. If needed, reacquaint yourself with the mind-boggling news of the resurrection, what that means for life here, and what that means for you.

Are you in a place spiritually where you sense the difference Jesus is making in your life? Are you walking with Him in such a way that you would want to talk about it?

**2. Are you saying it?**

Being a witness requires taking the stand at some point. It requires speaking up, to say what we've seen and heard. It may involve asking people good questions, or answering their questions. But the message of the gospel is news that must be spoken. It relies on witnesses.

There are a thousand possible barriers for you to not be in the practice of doing this. Some simply require repentance, and others require thoughtful engagement. But here's what I'd encourage you with: it's often way simpler than it sounds.

Two minutes of honest testimony, better if it's broken and unschooled. Just plain speech about Jesus, about how you came to trust Him, about the difference He's made in your life. It doesn't feel like much in the moment, but more often than not, the Holy Spirit does a lot with it.

And here's the last thing I'll say about this: one of the things I've learned in ministry is that even though people don't always show it on the outside, so many are absolutely desperate to hear about Jesus on the inside.

The people that you work with and live near, work out with, do hobbies alongside, pass in everyday life, let me tell you something about them. They put on a good front. They look like they have their stuff together.

They are desperate for some good news. Even if they don't ultimately respond as if they are to the message of the gospel, they are still desperate for it.

They need to hear about a God who loves them even on their worst day. They need to hear that the deepest problem in their soul is not any of the things they are aware of, but that they've declared independence from this God. That they are so sinful Christ had to die for them, but so loved that He was glad to.

They need to hear that death couldn't hold Jesus down. And that means it doesn't have to hold power over us either.

They need to hear how you are working all of this out for yourself, how Jesus is changing you, slowly but surely. They need to see it on your face, and in your actions, even as they hear your words—so that you end up reminding them of the one their soul was made for.

They need a witness. What a gift that we get to be that for them.