



Sent Week 4

Boldness in the Face of Oppression

Last week in **Sent 3 - Devoted**, we explored the events immediately following Acts 2:42-47. In this passage, we were given a glimpse into the practices and habits of the first Christians (who early on were called followers of the Way). The Church is often seen as a building or institution, but it is really a group of people who know and follow Jesus together. For the earliest church, living in Christian community involved three major things: devotion to the apostles' teachings, devotion to radical fellowship, and devotion to sacrificial generosity.

This week, we will pick up the story with a much lengthier passage, Acts Chapters 3-4. The first miracle performed by the apostles is recorded, and the apostles continue to boldly preach the Gospel in the city of Jerusalem. However, the Jewish religious authorities confront and arrest Peter and John, demanding that they halt their preaching. When the mission and message of Jesus Christ goes forward, it will be met with opposition. How are we to respond? Christians are called to meet this opposition with boldness of heart and clarity of mission.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
 - What is something the group can be praying about?
 - What is something the group can praise this week?
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- When you hear that we face opposition in this world, what comes to your mind?
 - What do you think boldness looks like for a Christian?
 - Does looking back at the history of the early church and what the apostles experienced help us?
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BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Context for Arrest: A Lame Man Healed (Acts 3:1-12)

In Acts Chapter 3, Peter and John arrive at the Temple in Jerusalem to pray, a central place of gathering for the early Church. It is easy to forget that Christianity began as a form of Judaism, only differing in that it proclaimed the Messiah. For this reason, early Christians still engaged in Jewish religious practices such as this. The Temple was for the Jews the dwelling place of God on Earth and where His presence directly presided. Nowhere in the world could a person be more literally close to God.

At one of the Temple gates, referred to in the text as the Beautiful Gate, a lame man is found asking those around him for money. Before the time of government assistance and modern medicine, those with a disability such as this were completely dependent on the generosity of the community or their loved ones to sustain themselves. It is likely that many in the community knew who this man was. Peter and John approached the lame man, but rather than offering silver or gold, they called upon the name of Jesus and healed the man of his affliction. In that very moment, the man stood and walked.

Should we be surprised? Jesus had said to His disciples before His ascension:

John 14:12 (ESV)

¹⁴ "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

The apostles have little reaction to their miracle as the crowds begin to form in amazement; they instead pivot to something they see as far more significant.

Although science and medicine were primitive by today's standards, both were advanced enough at the time for people to recognize what had truly occurred was a miracle. Although the man asked for money, Peter and John offered him something more; they offered a permanent solution to his physical and spiritual problems. The man walked alongside Peter and John afterward praising God for everyone to hear. When a person is touched by God and they experience his power and glory, they cannot keep quiet about it.

The Apostles Were Bold Because: They Valued the Gospel (Acts 3:12-4:12)

Immediately following the healing of the lame man, Peter and John begin to preach the Gospel. Responding to the astonishment of the crowd, Peter makes an interesting statement.



Acts 3:12 (NIV)

¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

The apostles were not surprised by what they had done, because for them miracles were not a surprise; they were an expectation. Jesus had performed such acts in their midst for many years and promised they would do the same when He was gone. For the apostles, it was more surprising that people still hadn't gotten the picture. This was not the work of man, but the work of God. This is what He does because this is who He is. It's this unwavering faith and knowledge of who God is and what He does that allows the apostles to dismiss a miracle. Instead, they value the message of Jesus more than miracles.

The healing of the lame man served only as a launching point for the message of the Gospel to be preached before the people in the Temple. They did not chase the sensational or seek to amaze through miraculous acts. Rather, they used the miracles of God to tell people about what God had done for them through Jesus. The apostles understood that miracles only serve to point to Jesus, and they'd rather point to Him than their own actions.

The greatest miracle of all had already been performed among them: God had stepped from His throne in Heaven into the pages of human history, lived among them as a regular man, willingly suffered a gruesome death to permanently reconcile them to the Father, rose again from the grave, and now awaits a glorious return to restore all things. That is the Gospel, and nothing mattered more than this fact. When someone grasps this truth, miracles become no big deal.

Peter in his sermon continually refers to the Old Testament to prove Jesus' messiahship, a running theme of the apostles' preaching. Failing to understand what had come before diminished the significance of what had now happened. Peter mentions two prophetic passages as explaining Jesus' coming: Deuteronomy 18:15 and Genesis 12:3. Naturally, this draws the ire of the Jewish religious authorities. For one, they saw the apostles as misinterpreting Scripture and spreading heresy. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection from the dead at all, making Jesus an impossibility. Other members of the privileged religious class only believed in resurrection as an end times event, meaning such things couldn't happen in the middle of history.

Peter and John are arrested and brought before the rulers and elders the following day. Yet, despite such opposition, they do not appear afraid. Rather, the same Gospel they preached before the crowds gives them boldness to stand up against them:



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Acts 4:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹ If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

We can meet opposition with boldness as well if we are clear about what is most important: the message of Jesus. Only focusing on miracles, or seeking for God to do big things, although good, results in shallow Christians who rely on experiences to tell them what they believe about Jesus. We want people to focus on the message of Jesus, the Gospel, not on chasing feel good moments from God.

A focus on methods results in timidity that seeks to hold on to what *was* instead of seeing what *is*: how God wants to move the message forward through us. The religious leaders made this mistake; they were scared to death of the miracles the apostles performed and were unable to see what was right in front of them. The acts of the apostles proved Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. The truth of this Gospel gave them power and assurance.

The Apostles Were Bold Because: They Had Been with Jesus (Acts 4:13-22)

The religious authorities quickly realized that Peter and John would not recant their message. With no other option, they decided to threaten Peter and John with deadly consequences, but once again the pair was not dismayed in the slightest despite the opposition growing worse. Instead, the two declare:

Acts 4:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Boldness comes from a relationship with Jesus. The apostles had known Jesus personally and witnessed His miracles; how could they remain silent? For them, He wasn't some phantom figure in the sky. Rather, he was a real person they had lived with, eaten with, and served with. The religious authorities mention that Peter and John did not appear to them to be trained or educated men, yet they preached before the crowds with knowledge and authority.

Peter and John's ability did not originate with themselves, and so boldness does not find itself in human skill. Many in the Church are not bold in their walk with Christ, and they blame this lack of boldness on their being ill-equipped to be good witnesses. They claim



they don't know enough, or won't know what to say, or won't know when to say it. Acts 4 proves that this is a poor excuse.

The truth is we are not bold because we are not connected with Jesus like the apostles were. We must attach ourselves to Jesus if we are going to be useful and bold as we push the message of the Gospel forward. That means being intentionally connected to the church, being intentional about spending time with Christ through reading the Bible and being intentional about seeking God through prayer. If you fear being ill-equipped, then take action. When we are connected to Christ, other people will notice!

They Were Bold Because: They Were Filled with the Spirit (Acts 4:23-31)

Peter and John, with the scribes unable to formally charge them with a crime, release them. However, Peter and John now have a decision to make. Considering the danger they now clearly face, and the potential consequences, there is the temptation to listen to the authorities and cower down. Instead, they pray to God to make them bold, and God's response is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:31 (ESV)

³¹ 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.

The text says Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke before the rulers and elders as well. This is a reminder that they didn't have to be afraid because they weren't alone; God was in their presence. The same truth applies to the Church today. We only have reason to fear if we have been left alone by God, but the good news is we haven't; the Holy Spirit is with us, and so God is with us.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.



- Do you find it odd that the apostles were not impressed by their own miracles? What does that say about the importance of the Gospel?
- What excuses do we make not to be bold for the sake of Jesus? Why can we no longer consider them valid excuses?
- Opposition from the world should be expected in a fallen world.
 - What kind of opposition from the world do you fear most?
 - Based on what you read about the apostles, how are we going to respond?