

## **“The Gospel is Worth Your Life”**

Acts 4:1-31

June 13, 2010

Last Sunday we spent time looking at an amazing miracle found in Acts chapter 3. A 40 year old man who was born crippled was begging for money when apostles Peter and John showed up. Peter said to the man, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Peter took the man by the hand and helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. In the outer area of the temple, the man was jumping up and down and was praising God. This is the man who had never walked in his life. This is the man whose mom and dad never saw their son take his first baby steps. This is the man whose parents were never able to tell their neighbors, “Hey our boy took his first steps today.” At the age of 40+ he took his very first steps.

The people nearby were filled with wonder and amazement because they had recognized this former beggar who could now walk on his own two feet. Soon a huge crowd surrounded Peter and John. Peter seized the opportunity and shared a powerful gospel message. He tailored it specifically for the audience that was present- Jewish men and women. Peter preached that the Messiah had come and the Jewish leaders had killed Him. But God raised Him from the dead and He is now sitting at God’s right hand until the appropriate time when He will come back again to reign forever.

This morning we are going to see the results of the miraculous healing and preaching of the gospel by Peter. Please turn with me to Acts chapter 4 starting with verse 1. **[SLIDE]**

There were two different reactions to hearing the gospel in Acts 4. And these reactions are the same as today. There will be those who accept the message and those who reject it.

**[SLIDE] The Gospel message was accepted by many Jews.**

Verse 4, says. “Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.” After the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost, Jesus had more

followers in that short amount of time than He likely had after walking the earth, healing and casting out demons for three years. In chapter 2 of Acts, Peter preached the gospel and three thousand accepted the message and were baptized. As believers began to be open with the gospel, more people were added daily to the family of God.

The healing of the crippled man and subsequent gospel message by Peter was accepted by many Jewish men. More than a thousand or more Jewish men repented of their sins and accepted Jesus and His call on their lives that day. Now when it says 5,000 Jewish men it is not referencing all the women and children who may have accepted Jesus as well. In those days, the culture emphasized the men. The new converted Jewish men would've taken the gospel to their families. And the majority of family members would've accepted Jesus as well.

When men come to faith it changes the family. Most family members will believe what the husband or father believes. Here is an amazing fact for you in regards to the "probability of winning a home for Christ". It depends greatly on who is first to accept Christ. **[SLIDE]** If a youth is the first person to accept Jesus as Savior there is a 3.5% probability that the remainder of the family will choose Jesus. If a mother is the first to believe there is a 17% probability that the rest of the family will accept Christ. But if the dad is the first to accept Jesus there is a 93% probability that the rest of the family will become believers. That is huge!

Men, never underestimate the importance you play spiritually in the home. You may not be the first to accept Christ in the home but your commitment to Christ is the most important one in the family. The wife watches you. The kids watch you. If you are enthusiastically growing in Christ and have a passion for the church there is a great probability that your kids and grandkids will have your passion.

So the 5,000 men who accepted Peter's message could be closer to 15,000 men, women and children quite easily. Remember all these people were accepting Jesus in the very city that He was crucified. Less than two months earlier many of these Jews who accepted the message were likely in the crowd yelling "Crucify Him!" as well as "Let his blood be on us and our children."

Many people accepted the message and joined God's team. But not everyone. [SLIDE]

**The Gospel message was rejected by many Jewish leaders.**

Look at verse 1-3, [SLIDE] “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 and 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.” Peter and John were preaching the gospel within the temple area. The huge crowd running up to Peter and John caught the Jewish leaders' attention. So the priests of the temple, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees showed up on the scene. For a little clarification on the different Jewish leaders; the captain of the temple guard was the commander of a band of Levites that guarded the temple gates. He was the chief of police you might say. The Sadducees was a Jewish religious group that had differing views than the Pharisees. One of the biggest disagreements was the afterlife. Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife. They believed that when you died your body and soul remained in the ground. This view makes you think they got their name because it is **Sad You See** to not believe in heaven.

Jesus had done some amazing things but He was turning the people away from the traditions of the faith. These leaders could not let this Jesus hijack their faith. So they had him killed. The Jewish leaders had thought they had taken care of this Jesus figure and His followers. All was quiet for a while. Word was getting out that this Jesus was no longer in the tomb. That was worrisome but in due time things should get back to normal. People had come and gone claiming unique views in the past but after they were threatened or killed their followers disbanded. That was what the Jewish leaders thought would happen with Jesus and his disciples.

But the followers of Jesus became bolder. Now they were teaching in the temple area where hundreds would hear their messages. The disciples became a threat to all that the leaders held dear.

Put yourself in the sandals of a Sadducee. You have studied God's Word and laws for years; you have debated and challenged different views successfully; you earned the position you have now. Your position gives you a lot of clout in the community. People look to you for answers. When

you walk in public you are greeted with admiration and praise. Now here come along these uneducated individuals who claim that there is a resurrection of the dead. Your whole identity and religious position is being challenged. If too many people believe these men that cherished position will come crashing down and you will look like a fool for believing there was is resurrection of the dead. How would you feel?

You'd feel like the Sadducees felt. Verse 2 says, "They were greatly disturbed or angered because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead."

The Jewish leaders wanted the commotion and message to stop. So Peter and John were seized and put into jail until the next day. The next day, Peter and John were brought before the most important Jewish leaders of their day. Annas was the ex high priest and father in law to Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the reigning high priest and presided over the Sanhedrin. Both of these men were involved in the murder of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin was a council in Jerusalem that functioned as the central judicial authority for Jews. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members of the priestly families- teachers of the law, Pharisees and Sadducees. These two ordinary men- Peter and John stood before this large group of hostile Jewish rulers who were not afraid to murder those in opposition. Peter & John were asked to give an account as to how they could do such a miracle.

One of the requirements for baptism and membership in our church is to give a testimony of how Jesus changed your life. It can be as long as 3 minutes or as short as "I have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord." Either one is valid for membership. Many are afraid to get up in front of people. But what is more difficult- to share what Jesus did in front of 300 people cheering you on or 71 who are looking to prove you wrong? In front of 300 people who are excited to hear your story or 71 that want to see you and your message disappear?

How can we overcome the fear to share with those who are for God and with those who are against Him? The answer is the same- **be filled with the Holy Spirit**. When we yield ourselves

to the Holy Spirit by surrendering our will, mind, body, heart and emotions to Him He will give us the power and boldness to share. The Holy Spirit resides in the believer so we have access to that power and boldness from within. God wants to share through us. But He will not strong arm us into speaking.

Do you want to experience God in new and amazing ways? Open yourself to Him and allow God to speak through you. You don't have to will yourself not to be scared. Just surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit and trust Him to show up. He will not let you down. So what are you waiting for? By the way, I have yet to meet someone who gave their testimony in our church and not be glad and grow from that experience.

Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, didn't dodge their question, "By what power or what name did you do this?" The Holy Spirit empowered him to speak boldly. Just like in Acts 3, Peter explains the gospel to them using Jewish beliefs and history. Peter was straight forward with the gospel. Peter said, "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." The reality is the gospel is foolishness to the perishing. The gospel is offensive even when spoken with grace. We don't want to needlessly offend people by the way we share the gospel but the gospel will be offensive.

Peter proclaims Jesus and gives an extremely bold statement in verse 12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." I like how *The Message* paraphrase has this verse, [SLIDE] "Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one." Salvation is God's way of delivering people from sin and death. Salvation is much more than a prayer. Salvation is a change of allegiance. Salvation is God rescuing us from the dominion of Satan to God. It is God redeeming us from slavery to sin to slavery to God.

Unfortunately, the evangelical church preaches: come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. Once you do that you are safe. But there is more to salvation than that. There is to be a change in who is in charge. God doesn't save us to give us freedom to do whatever we choose in this life. He doesn't rescue us so that we have permission to sin as we like. God saves us from slavery to sin

into a new slavery- slavery to Jesus and righteousness. Though we are God's dearly loved children, we must not forget that we are His slaves as well.

The word slave has such a bad connotation for us in America and rightly so. That is most likely why the NIV when faced with the Greek word *doulos* translated it as servant. But that is not what the Greek word means. It means slave. **Christians are God's slaves.** Believers belong to God. As slaves we do what our Master requires willingly. We lay down our rights and dreams to God in order to fulfill His will and purpose for our lives. [SLIDE] 1 Cor 7:22-23, "he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.<sup>23</sup> You were bought at a price..." And 1 Cor 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." What was the purchase price for our freedom from slavery to sin? The price was Jesus' life.

After this bold message the Sanhedrin sent Peter and John away so they could discuss what to do with them. The healing of the crippled man could not be denied. And so many Jews now believed in Jesus that if they tried to kill the men there would be a huge uproar.

Back in the 70's and early 80's Josef Tson, a Romanian Pastor was being persecuted for preaching the gospel. Police would barge into his home and confiscate religious books. He was arrested on a few occasions. Once when he was in prison, the leaders were contemplating killing him. If they killed him they thought his message would die too. Surrendered to the Spirit, Josef boldly challenged them to kill him. He said that if they killed him for the sake of the gospel, his shed blood would make the message 20 times more powerful to those around him. That boldness and statement scared the persecutors. With few other options they released Josef from prison.

The Sanhedrin could not kill Peter and John but they needed to stop the spread of their message. They threatened Peter and John and tried to bar them from speaking or teaching about Jesus. I love what Peter and John said in verses 19-20, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and

heard.” Listen to the NLT, [SLIDE] “But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? [20](#) We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

Since the Sanhedrin didn't know what else to do they released Peter and John. Immediately they went back and reported to the believers what had happened which resulted in praise and prayer.

Chapters 3-4 looks like a storybook. It starts with a sad situation; then a rescuer comes into the scene and changes things for good. But evil is not happy and tries to ruin everything. Evil doesn't win and peace and happiness lasts ever after. Unfortunately this peace and happiness doesn't last long. Acts 4 is the first occurrence of persecution of the church. In the chapters following we see persecution growing increasingly violent. Some will die because they confessed Jesus publicly.

Just like last week, let's ask the question: what can we apply from Acts 4? [SLIDE]

**First, you will experience persecution when sharing the gospel.**

Persecution is part of the Christian life. It is more of the norm than what we experience. I received an email from Jews for Jesus on Friday sharing how the evil one is trying to thwart the gospel. Jews for Jesus wrote, “We've experienced a new side to the opposition. This has come from Isla\*\*\*\*\* extreme\*\*\*\*\* who attacked our website. Over 5,000 websites in Israel have been hacked into and an anti-Israel message was posted in place of the website. Our website was one of them. It took over 12 hours for our web master to get our website up and running. Please pray that this does not happen again. Our media is dependent on our website since it's mostly Internet based.”

In America, the Christian life doesn't come with a lot of persecution. But the way our country is heading with the undercurrent of hatred toward anything of Jesus, we may someday be faced with persecution. Though we don't see the intensity of persecution in our country it is happening in other places of the world. Christians are losing their jobs, are being imprisoned, beaten, tortured and even killed for their faith in Christ.

When Romania was persecuting Christians heavily, if you held a high position, and the employers heard you had become a Christian you be demoted or even lose your job. “A man, who was top manager of a huge factory, got converted. About a month later, he came to his Pastor and said, 'Brother Josef, they found out that I became a Christian. Now they are going to bring together thousands of people, the whole factory. They will mock me, deride me and then, of course, demote me. I'll be happy if they even keep me on the smallest salary possible. But they will give me a few minutes to defend myself. How shall I do it?'

Brother Josef responded ‘Don’t defend yourself. This is your great chance. Tell them who Jesus is, what He did in you and what He is for you today.’ Instantly his face shone and he said, 'Oh, I know what I'm going to do!' And he did it. So effectively that, afterwards, he kept coming to me saying, 'You know, I hardly can move in the factory today. Wherever I go, somebody grabs my hand, pulls me into the corner, checks to make sure that nobody sees him talking with me and then he says, ‘Give me the address of your church.’ Or, ‘Tell me more about Jesus.’ Or, “Give me a Bible.” People were saved because of the way that man suffered for the Lord.”

**[SLIDE] Second, God takes priority over the law of the land.**

We live in a safe society right now. We are not outlawed from worshiping together or having a Bible in our possession or sharing the gospel with our neighbors and friends. But there may come a time when we have to choose who to follow- God or the law? If the law is contrary to God’s Word then we must obey God- no matter the consequences. As Peter and John said, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? [20](#) We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

This morning we saw the value of the gospel in relation to the disciple’s lives. The gospel was not a neat story that they kept to themselves. The gospel wasn’t just shared with people that were easy to talk with. No, the gospel was of supreme importance that they’d willingly suffer and be persecuted to make sure it was being heard.

Many missionaries are choosing to obey God over the laws in the countries where they are serving. If they obeyed the laws in many countries Jesus would not be proclaimed. Those laws will one day pass away but people’s souls will live forever. So which takes priority- laws or

people's souls? The gospel takes priority over everything. The gospel is a higher priority than our safety. The gospel is worth your life.

**[SLIDE] Third, you don't need a college or seminary education to be a witness for God.**

After Peter's bold message verse 13 says that when the leaders "saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus." The power and boldness doesn't come from books. It comes from the Holy Spirit. God can use what little we know for His great purposes. What really do we need to know to share the saving work of Jesus Christ with others? Do we need to have all the names of books of the Bible memorized? Do we need to know the themes of each book of the Bible? Do we need to understand the details of the end times? All these things are good and worth exploring but they do not need to be mastered to be effective for Jesus. If you understand the gospel and you can share how God has changed your life you can start today.

Did you know the strongest argument for the gospel is the personal testimony of someone whose life has been changed by it? We saw that reality in Acts 4. The crippled man was healed. There was no debate about that. People cannot deny the power of God when you show them your changed lives. If you have Jesus in your life you have a story to tell.

"Charles Bradlaugh, an avowed atheist, once challenged the Rev. H.P. Hughes to a debate. The preacher, who was head of a rescue mission in London, England, accepted the challenge with the condition that he could bring with him 100 men and women who would tell what had happened in their lives since trusting Christ as their Savior. They would be people who once lived in deep sin, some having come from poverty-stricken homes caused by their parents' drug and alcohol problems. Hughes said they would not only tell of their conversion, but would submit to cross-examination by any who doubted their stories. The minister invited his opponent to bring a group of non-believers who could tell how they were helped by their lack of faith. When the appointed day arrived, the preacher came, accompanied by 100 transformed persons. But Bradlaugh never showed up. The meeting turned into a testimony time and many sinners who had gathered to hear the scheduled debate were converted to Christ."

Jesus said the fields are ready to be harvested and He was referring to those who did not know Jesus but were ready to hear and accept Him. We do not have the eyes to see who is ready to hear. But God sees and knows. He will guide us to those we are to share with. And God offers us His boldness and power to share the gospel.

Our vision is: “Becoming a spiritually dynamic body making a significant impact in vulnerable families through our neighborhood schools.” We will become more spiritually dynamic as we surrender ourselves daily to the Spirit and as we spread the gospel to those who have not heard or understood.

Sharing and living out the gospel will require your time, money, reputation, hobbies, relationships, jobs and maybe even changing where you live. All the things we have on this earth are temporal- they will not last. But the gospel is the gateway to eternal life for anyone who hears and accepts it. Paul would be asking us the question that he asked in Rom 10:14 “But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?”

**[SLIDE] What will the Gospel cost you?**

Let's pray