

The Church Articulates the Gospel with Boldness

June 22, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Acts 4:19-31

Session Outline

1. Can't Stop, Won't Stop (Acts 4:19-20)
2. With All Boldness (Acts 4:23-30)
3. Answered Prayer (Acts 4:31)

Theological Theme

A healthy church shares the gospel boldly. Acts 4 gives us an example of what this looks like in action and what happens when the church adopts this heart posture.

Call to Action

With whom have you not shared the gospel or not started down that path because you are afraid of their response? Pray for boldness (vv. 29-31)!



Leader Guide

The Church Articulates the Gospel with Boldness

Introduction

What does it mean to be unstoppable? If you're talking football, it means the 1972 Miami Dolphins. With Pro Football Hall of Famers like Nick Buoniconti, Larry Csonka, Larry Little, and Bob Griese, the 1972 Miami Dolphins remain the only team in professional football to ever have the perfect season, winning every game including the championship. Amazingly, this record still holds today, with other teams coming close but not quite managing to replicate the Dolphins' success.¹

In our study today, we're going to talk about another group who was unstoppable. Their mission wasn't sports greatness, though, it was the glory of God and the spread of the gospel.

- ❓ Why might we describe the early church as unstoppable?
- ❓ What gave them the power to live this way? How should that encourage us too?

Session Summary

In today's study, we'll explore what it means to share the gospel boldly. In Acts 4, Peter and John boldly shared the truth about Jesus in front of the Sanhedrin—the very governing body who had condemned Jesus mere months earlier. They knew firsthand what a powerful body the Sanhedrin was, but they stood firm in the truth anyway. They even went home and prayed that the Lord would make them bolder as they continued to share the good news, heal, and perform signs and wonders in Jesus's name. Their mission to share the gospel was bigger than themselves and worth any risk. They knew they'd need the Lord's help to continue, and He answered their prayer powerfully.

1. Can't Stop, Won't Stop (Acts 4:19-20)

- ❓ How did Peter and John display boldness in these verses?
- ❓ What types of risks do we take when we share the gospel in our communities?


Since the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter and John had been boldly acting as Jesus's witnesses, preaching the good news about Him, healing a lame man in the temple (Acts 3:1-10), and helping thousands come to know Jesus and accept His gift of salvation (Acts 4:4). This healing of a lame man attracted the attention of the religious leaders, and Peter and John were taken into custody overnight (Acts 4:3).

When Peter and John were questioned in front of the religious leaders in Jerusalem the next day, Acts records that "Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8) as he spoke to them, calling out their sin (v.10), connecting prophecy to Jesus (v. 11), and sharing the good news with them (v. 12).


It doesn't get much bolder than sharing the gospel with the very men who detained you to prevent you from preaching in Jesus's name. Take a moment to consider Peter and John's position. They were standing before the Sanhedrin, the very governing body that condemned Jesus mere months earlier, but they didn't back down.


For Peter and John, the Sanhedrin was a very powerful enemy. They believed it was their job to protect Judaism, and they had a right to examine new teachers like Peter and John. Though they couldn't find a reason to punish them in this instance (v. 21), this outcome wasn't assured for Peter and John in the future. Even though they knew the risks, they still preached the gospel.

The leaders were amazed at Peter and John, but they didn't want the truth about Jesus to spread, so they "ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (v. 18). In the face of this order from the Sanhedrin, Peter and John answered that they couldn't stop talking about what they had seen and heard. They knew the truth about Jesus, and they couldn't stop telling people about it. When we know Jesus, we want to tell other people about Him and how He has transformed our lives.

 Application: What risks hold you back from sharing the gospel in your own life?

2. With All Boldness (Acts 4:23-30)

 How do you typically respond to obstacles to sharing your faith?

 How did Peter and John respond? What did they say and what did they specifically ask for?

The Sanhedrin's Problem

The members of the Sanhedrin were in a quandary. The apostles were popular with the people for healing the man, and the Sanhedrin could not deny the clear evidence of the healing. On the other hand, they wanted the messianic preaching to stop. Their solution was to issue a formal ban on the Christian message. This would establish legal responsibility should the apostles continue preaching Christ. Peter told them what to expect: How could he not continue to testify to the power of God he had seen at work in Christ?

Freshly released from the Sanhedrin, Peter and John returned to the body of believers to tell them everything that happened. In response, they didn't cower or decide it wasn't safe to continue preaching the gospel even though they could have been in very real danger; no, they turned to God in prayer with the intention to keep going. Through our study of Acts, we've talked about the vital importance prayer plays in the life of a believer, and this passage is a beautiful demonstration of prayer in action in the early church.

Note that they prayed together (v. 24). They were united. This wasn't just Peter and John's problem. Peter and John shared what was going on, and the church joined together in taking it to the Lord in prayer. This is the type of unity a healthy church enjoys. Problems are shared, and the believers join in prayer together.

Let's break down their prayer:

“Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them” (v. 24). They began with praise. God made everything, and He deserves all praise. When we give Him the praise He deserves, it gives us perspective. Paul said it best in Romans: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31b, ESV). He is capable of working in any and every situation, and we simply are not.

“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah” (v. 26). They turned to Scripture. In their case, they saw a connection between Peter and John's brush with the Sanhedrin and the words of Psalm 2.² They knew that Herod, Pontius Pilate, some Gentiles, and some people of Israel had all united against Jesus (v. 27).

Because the believers knew this Psalm, they recognized its truth in their situation and took comfort. When we study Scripture, the Holy Spirit helps us make connections like this, and using Scripture in our prayers is incredibly powerful.

“To do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place” (v. 28). Even when powerful people like Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Sanhedrin stand against the Messiah, it was predestined in God's will. They could only do what God allowed. God is still on His throne, in charge no matter what happens. He's not surprised or taken aback. What great hope lies in this!

Notice, too, what they didn't pray for here. They didn't ask God to end the plotting or for their enemies to fall. It is okay for us to ask for things


like this when we come to God in prayer, but we must always have the understanding that God’s will takes priority over our will and wishes. Though things might not always work out the way we want or expect, Scripture tells us that God works all things together for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28).

“Grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness” (v. 29). At the end of their prayer (vv. 29-30), we find the things they are praying for: boldness as they shared the gospel, healing, and performing signs and wonders in Jesus’s name.


Paul requested a similar prayer for himself in Ephesians: “Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (6:19).


The Greek word translated as “boldness” here is the same word Luke used in Acts 4:29: *parrēsia*. It means to speak freely, openly, frankly, publicly, and confidently. It means to speak without hiding.³ Speaking this way requires courage, and the believers were praying for more of it because they needed it. Even with the Sanhedrin potentially working against them, they weren’t going to hide.

As Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

 Application: Have you ever prayed for this type of boldness? What happened? If you haven’t, why not? What might hold you back from asking for this?

3. Answered Prayer (Acts 4:31)

 How did God answer in verse 31?

 Why can we also have confidence when we ask God for boldness to tell others about Him?

The believers’ prayer was immediately answered in verse 31 with a resounding yes. The heart behind their prayer was one intent on glorifying the Lord and sharing the good news about Jesus, just like He’d commanded, and the Lord immediately equipped them.

Scripture records that their meeting place was shaken—another amazing event like the ones they experienced on Pentecost—and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and started to speak God’s Word boldly, just like they’d asked for.

This is the third time Scripture records that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, but that doesn't mean the Spirit had left him.⁴ Once the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us, He doesn't go away. He stays with us forever, but the activeness of His role can vary depending on our openness to Him. Are we working for Him or against Him? Are we seeking the Lord in prayer and by studying His Word? The Holy Spirit can do great things in our lives when we pray for His help and come to God with an open and willing heart ready to glorify and serve Him according to His will.

For the believers of the early church, the result of this prayer wasn't just that they could speak boldly; it brought more unity, and we read that they had "great power" and received "great grace" from the Lord (v. 33). Everyone was taken care of, the church was thriving, and many were saved! Just think what the local church today could do if we all joined together in prayer and adopted the heart posture and desire of the early church to share the gospel with boldness.



Application: Would you describe yourself as a bold in your faith? Why or why not? How will you seek to grow in this area?

Conclusion

In the beginning of Acts 4, Peter and John were detained and brought in front of the Sanhedrin because they healed a lame man at the temple. When they were questioned and ordered to stop speaking and teaching in Jesus's name, Peter and John stood boldly, sharing the truth about Jesus and proclaiming that they couldn't stop speaking about what they had witnessed. This was a big risk! The Sanhedrin didn't have enough cause to punish Peter and John for healing a man, but that didn't guarantee they were safe forever. Peter and John, though, were very familiar with the power of the Sanhedrin, and they stayed strong in the gospel anyway. They spoke the truth about Jesus, even though they knew the risk. For them, Jesus was worth more than anything the Sanhedrin could take away, including their lives.

After the Sanhedrin released them, Peter and John headed back to the body of believers to update them on everything that happened. Their response? They joined together in prayer but in a way that might be different than we would expect. They didn't pray for the downfall of those working against them. They recognized that this was all a part of God's plan and that even the working of the Sanhedrin against the Messiah was all predestined by God—and His plans are always above ours. In their prayer, they asked for boldness as they continued to share the gospel, heal, and perform signs and wonders in Jesus's name. They didn't intend to

stop. Jesus had given them and command, which they were taking very seriously, and they knew they needed the Lord's help to continue, so they asked for it.

The prayer of the gathered believers was answered immediately after they finished praying it. God answered powerfully with a yes, filling them with the Holy Spirit and enabling them to speak His Word boldly. As a result, the church was healthy and thriving.

- ❓ What words would you use to describe Peter and John's faith here? How can we work to cultivate similar traits in our own sharing of the gospel?
- ❓ What can we learn from the way that the believers prayed in Acts 4, and how can we integrate this into our prayer lives individually and as a group?
- ❓ Who is God calling you to proclaim His message to boldly? How will you respond?

Prayer of Response

Praise God for His sovereignty. Thank Him for His plan for our lives. Thank Him for helping us and walking with us when we struggle. Ask Him to give your group boldness as you go out to share the gospel.

Memory Verse

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; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." — Acts 4:19-20

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Acts* by Tony Merida
- *Acts* by Darrell Bock
- *The Acts of the Apostles* by David Peterson

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Extended Commentary

Acts 4:19-31

4:19–20 Peter and John’s reference to what they had seen and heard included their experiences with Jesus plus what they had witnessed since the founding of the church at Pentecost. All told, they had been eyewitnesses to many of God’s revelatory acts.

4:21–23 The fact that the man was over forty years old seemed to the Jews to rule out the likelihood of healing.

4:24–28 When Peter and John told the members of their fellowship what had happened, they all recognized this persecution as fulfillment of Ps 2:1–2. Gentiles and the people of Israel had united in opposition to God’s holy servant Jesus and his followers. Then and now, believers take comfort in knowing that Jesus’s sufferings (as well as their own) are not by chance, but are predestined by God. This is another place in Scripture where divine sovereignty and human responsibility are simultaneously affirmed (see also 2:23).

4:29 The early Christians recognized that just as Jesus had been promised trouble, they too would encounter persecution for proclaiming him as the Messiah. They asked God for the power to speak with all boldness, even if punishment should follow.

4:30 Besides boldness in testifying, the early Christians expected to receive power from God to perform healing, and signs and wonders through the name of ... Jesus.

4:31 Their prayer was answered immediately.⁵

References

1. “‘The Perfect Season’: 1972 Miami Dolphins,” Pro Football Hall of Fame, accessed March 26, 2025, <https://www.profootballhof.com/football-history/the-perfect-season-1972-miami-dolphins/>.
2. Stanley E. Porter, “Acts,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1724.
3. Blue Letter Bible, “Strong’s G3954 – parrēsia,” accessed March 26, 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3954/csb/mgnt/0-1/>.
4. David Guzik, “Acts 4 — Peter and John Face the Sanhedrin,” Enduring Word, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-4/>.
5. Porter, “Acts,” 1724.