



A POWERFUL WITNESS • Evangelism

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 4:1-22

This passage is one of several great examples of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled. There, Luke recorded Jesus' promise: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." In Acts 4, he records one of the many times it was fulfilled. Over and over again in the book of Acts, and throughout the history of the church, this promise is lived out. The same is true today in the lives of Spirit-filled believers all over the world. When we yield our lives to Christ, confess our sins, and trust the Spirit of God to fill us, He empowers us to do great things for Him.

The events of the previous chapter are an important context for this chapter. Be sure to read both chapters three and four in preparation for this study. In chapter three, John and Peter healed a beggar who had been crippled for years. They used the opportunity to call their hearers to repentance and faith as they testified to the great power of the resurrected Jesus, and His willingness to forgive.

In chapter four, we see the power of the Holy Spirit on display in the apostles' lives. The religious leaders of the day are "greatly disturbed" because of this miracle and the preaching that followed it. Therefore, they arrest and jail Peter and John, hoping to intimidate them into silence, and quell the growth of this movement. They fail on both counts. The number of believers continues to increase to more than 5,000, up from only 120 at Christ's ascension! Peter and John speak boldly before their accusers, beginning the fulfillment of another promise Luke recorded in Luke 21:12-15:

They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

As Peter and John testify of the gospel, the leaders of the day, are astonished by their courage. They can't make sense of their bold, powerful witness. Confronted with incontrovertible evidence of a miracle, and men who can not be intimidated, they vainly order the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus. They probably aren't surprised by the response: "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." (Acts 4:19,20).

What's the Big Idea?

Acts 1:8 promises that God will give power to believers so that they can speak about Jesus in a supernatural way. Not only will they have extraordinary courage, but their words will also have great effect. This passage is an example of that being lived out by the apostles. It is meant as an encouragement to us so that we would rely on the Holy Spirit and experience the thrill of being His witnesses.

What's the Problem?

There are many things that can keep us from sharing the gospel, including fear or our own disinterest. Without the Spirit of God living in and empowering us we're unable to overcome the hindrances.



Notice that it isn't only the influence of the Spirit that gives them boldness. What they believe and are convinced of also compels them. In 4:12 Peter declares, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

That idea was no more popular in John and Peter's culture than it is in ours. But it just happened to be true and they knew it first hand. They were there when Jesus calmed the sea, healed the lepers and rose from the dead. They *knew* that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that apart from Him all men are lost. Knowing that He really is the only savior gave John and Peter boldness to speak and to suffer.

That kind of courage, and the compulsion to tell people about Jesus, is precisely what the Holy Spirit produces. He can do the same for the students in your group.

What's Our Response?

Look for opportunities to be put in a position where radical faith and great power is required. Could it be that you never experience the thrill of the Holy Spirit's courage because you never do anything frightening? Determine to share your faith in a way that will require you to depend on the Holy Spirit's power. Trust Him to fill you as He promised.

What Are the Questions?

Acts 4:1-22

LAUNCH

What is the most frightening thing you have ever attempted for Christ? What happened?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 4:1-22.

1. What is the situation that has set up the events in chapter 4?
2. Why are the religious leaders so threatened by the apostles' preaching?
3. What would you expect to happen to your ministry on your campus if the administration tried to shut it down? What happened in this passage? Why?
4. When the religious leaders arrested and tried to intimidate Peter and John how did they respond? Why?
5. How do you think you would feel if a professor challenged you about your faith in front of your class? What would you say?
6. In verse 12, Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." How do you think this belief affected his message to the rulers?
7. How would you respond to the question, "How can you say Jesus is the only way to God? What about other religions, or those who haven't heard of Christ?"
8. What is the key to experiencing boldness and effectiveness in talking about Jesus?
9. Is courage something God gives us, or something He requires us to do?

APPLY

10. The religious leaders couldn't refute that a miracle had occurred. What is the evidence of the life-changing power of Jesus in *your* ministry? What steps of faith have you taken that would astonish those around you?
11. Unable to intimidate, the leaders vainly order Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. They refuse saying, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." How closely does that parallel your own desire to talk about Jesus?
12. What would it take to get you to stop talking about Jesus?
13. What does that tell you about what you really believe about Jesus? What does it suggest to you about the reality of the Holy Spirit's power in your life?

What Are the Answers?

1. Peter and John healed a crippled man and preached the gospel.
2. Jesus condemned them for their outward righteousness, and inward hardness of heart. As His followers grew, their influence was threatened.
3. Discuss the topic. Most would likely imagine the ministry would shrink, though the opposite happened here and throughout the history of persecution in the church. Persecution forces us to walk by faith, which God honors.
4. Discuss the topic. Peter and John were remarkably bold and testified of the gospel, despite knowing it would get them in further trouble.
5. Allow the group to discuss how they would answer these questions. See the accompanying article, "Lost" for additional insights. You might want to print out several copies for your group.
6. Only the power that the Holy Spirit gives to believers can produce that result.
7. Allow the group to discuss. God does motivate us, and can give us unusual boldness, but we are still responsible to act courageously. Courage implies that the task will not seem easy.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. He understood that apart from Christ, his opponents were lost. Their only hope was forgiveness in Christ. It was a small thing to suffer so that they could hear the gospel and believe.
- 10.-13. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12