

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 4 — Boldness Before the Sanhedrin and Unity in the Church

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 4 records the first major persecution against the growing church.

Peter and John had just witnessed the healing of a man who had been unable to walk for more than forty years.

The miracle drew a crowd.

Peter preached Jesus Christ.

He proclaimed the resurrection.

He called the people to repentance.

Many believed.

But not everyone welcomed the message.

The priests, the temple authorities, and especially the Sadducees became deeply disturbed because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

The apostles were arrested and brought before the same religious leadership that had opposed Jesus.

They were questioned:

“By what power or what name did you do this?”

Peter's answer was direct.

The healed man was standing because of:

Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Then Peter proclaimed one of the strongest statements concerning salvation found anywhere in Scripture:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

The religious leaders could see Peter and John's courage.

They knew these men did not possess the formal religious training of the ruling class.

Yet there was something unmistakable about them:

They had been with Jesus.

The leaders commanded them to stop speaking in Christ's name.

Peter and John refused.

They declared:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

After their release, the believers gathered for prayer.

Remarkably, they did not primarily pray for protection.

They prayed for:

Boldness.

God answered.

The place where they were meeting was shaken.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they continued speaking God's Word courageously.

The chapter ends by describing extraordinary unity and generosity within the church.

Acts 4 therefore demonstrates that opposition does not have to silence the church.

Instead:

Persecution can become an occasion for greater boldness, deeper prayer, stronger unity, and clearer proclamation of Jesus Christ.

I. OPPOSITION ARRIVES WHILE THE GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED

Acts 4:1 — Religious Leaders Confront Peter and John

“While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to them.”

Peter and John were still speaking when opposition arrived.

The resistance did not come because they were causing violence.

It came because they were preaching Jesus.

Cross References

Matthew 22:23

That same day some Sadducees came to Jesus. They were people who said there is no resurrection from the dead, and they questioned Him.

Luke 20:27

Some Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked Him a question.

Acts 5:17

Then the high priest and those with him, who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, became filled with jealousy.

The Sadducees were especially disturbed because they denied resurrection.

Peter and John were publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Spiritual Principle

Truth often meets resistance precisely where it challenges deeply held unbelief.

The apostles did not adjust the message to avoid controversy.

They remained faithful to what they had witnessed.

II. THE RESURRECTION BECOMES THE POINT OF CONFLICT

Acts 4:2 — Proclaiming Resurrection in Jesus

“They were greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”

The apostles' doctrine created the conflict.

They taught that resurrection was not merely a distant theological possibility.

It had already been demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Acts 17:18

Some philosophers said, “What is this man trying to say?” Others replied, “He seems to be proclaiming foreign gods,” because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 23:8

The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, no angel, and no spirit, but the Pharisees believe in all three.

1 Corinthians 15:12

If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

Key Truth

The resurrection was not a side issue in apostolic preaching. It stood at the center of the gospel.

III. THE APOSTLES ARE ARRESTED

Acts 4:3 — Put in Jail

“They seized them and put them in jail until the next day, since it was already evening.”

The apostles' first major public confrontation ends with imprisonment.

But imprisonment does not silence the message already preached.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The authorities arrested the apostles and placed them in the public jail.

Luke 21:12

Jesus said, “Before all these things happen, people will seize you, persecute you, hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and bring you before kings and governors because of My name.”

John 7:44

Some of the people wanted to arrest Jesus, but no one laid hands on Him.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness to Christ does not guarantee freedom from opposition.

Sometimes obedience brings conflict.

Jesus had already warned His followers that persecution would come.

IV. THE WORD CONTINUES TO BEAR FRUIT

Acts 4:4 — About Five Thousand Men Believe

“But many who heard the message believed; and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

Peter and John were arrested.

But the gospel was not arrested.

This verse begins with an important word:

“But.”

The authorities imprisoned the messengers.

But many believed.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about three thousand people were added that day.

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the believers.

Acts 6:7

God's Word continued to spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People may imprison God's servants, but they cannot imprison God's Word.

Opposition may slow human movement.

It cannot stop divine truth.

V. THE RULERS GATHER

Acts 4:5 — The Council Meets

“The next day the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.”

The Sanhedrin represented the highest Jewish religious council.

Peter and John were now standing before powerful men.

Cross References

Luke 22:66

When morning came, the elders of the people, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law gathered together, and Jesus was brought before their council.

Matthew 26:59

The chief priests and the entire council were searching for false testimony against Jesus so they could put Him to death.

John 11:47

Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council and asked, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs.”

Key Truth

Peter and John were standing before the same kind of authority that had condemned Jesus.

That makes their courage even more remarkable.

VI. THE HIGH PRIESTLY FAMILY IS PRESENT

Acts 4:6

“Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest’s family.”

These were influential religious leaders.

Annas and Caiaphas had also been involved in the trial of Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 3:2

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's Word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

John 18:13

They took Jesus first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

John 18:24

Then Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Spiritual Principle

The people who opposed Jesus now opposed those who proclaimed Jesus.

This fulfilled Christ's warning that servants should not expect to be treated better than their Master.

VII. “BY WHAT POWER OR WHAT NAME?”

Acts 4:7

“They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’”

The council wanted to know the source of the miracle.

Their question gave Peter exactly the opportunity he needed.

Cross References

Matthew 21:23

Jesus entered the temple and began teaching. The chief priests and elders came to Him and asked, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

Mark 11:28

They asked Jesus, “By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You authority to do them?”

Luke 20:2

They said to Jesus, “Tell us by what authority You are doing these things. Who gave You this authority?”

Spiritual Principle

Opposition can unintentionally create opportunities for gospel witness.

The rulers wanted an explanation.

Peter gave them Jesus.

VIII. PETER IS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 4:8

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people!’”

Peter's boldness was not merely personality.

He was:

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Luke 12:12

Jesus said, “The Holy Spirit will teach you at that very time what you should say.”

Matthew 10:20

Jesus said, “It will not simply be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Luke 21:15

Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.”

Jesus had promised His disciples help when they stood before hostile authorities.

Now the promise was being fulfilled.

Spiritual Principle

God gives grace for the moment in which obedience is required.

IX. ON TRIAL FOR AN ACT OF KINDNESS

Acts 4:9

“If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed—”

Peter exposes the strange nature of the trial.

A man had been healed.

A good deed had taken place.

Yet Peter and John were being interrogated.

Cross References

Acts 3:6

Peter told the man, “I do not have silver or gold, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Acts 3:16

Peter said, “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong.”

Acts 5:27

The apostles were brought before the council, and the high priest questioned them.

Spiritual Principle

People can oppose God's work even when its fruit is clearly good.

The issue was not really the man's healing.

The issue was the name of Jesus.

X. JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH HEALED THE MAN

Acts 4:10

“Then know this—you and all the people of Israel: 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.”

Peter's answer is fearless.

He does not soften the truth.

He tells the council:

You crucified Jesus.

God raised Jesus.

Jesus healed this man.

Cross References

Acts 2:36

Peter said, “Let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Acts 3:16

Peter said, “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know has been made strong.”

Acts 2:24

But God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing Him from the power of death, because death could not keep its hold upon Him.

Key Truth

The authority behind the miracle was the risen Jesus Christ.

XI. THE REJECTED STONE BECOMES THE CORNERSTONE

Acts 4:11

“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’”

Peter quotes Psalm 118.

The religious leaders were supposed to be builders of Israel's spiritual life.

Yet they rejected the very One upon whom God's redemptive work was centered.

Cross References

Psalm 118:22

The stone rejected by the builders has become the chief cornerstone.

Isaiah 28:16

Therefore the Lord God says, “Look, I am laying a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone and a sure foundation. The one who trusts in Him will not be shaken.”

Matthew 21:42

Jesus said, “Have you never read in Scripture: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Spiritual Principle

Human rejection cannot overturn God's choice.

Men rejected Christ.

God exalted Him.

XII. SALVATION IS FOUND IN CHRIST ALONE

Acts 4:12

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

This is one of Scripture's clearest declarations concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

Peter does not say:

Jesus is one path among many.

He says:

“No one else.”

Cross References

John 14:6

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

1 Timothy 2:5

There is one God and one Mediator between God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.

Acts 10:43

All the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

Key Truth

Salvation is exclusive in its source but universal in its invitation.

There is one Savior.

And everyone who believes in Him may be saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The church has no authority to offer people another way of salvation when God has given salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

XIII. ORDINARY MEN WITH EXTRAORDINARY BOLDNESS

Acts 4:13

“When they 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 council recognized that Peter and John lacked elite rabbinic training.

Yet their boldness and understanding were undeniable.

Then the rulers recognized something:

“These men had been with Jesus.”

Cross References

Matthew 11:25

Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and educated and revealed them to ordinary people.”

John 7:15

The Jewish leaders were amazed and asked, “How does this man know so much when He has never studied under our teachers?”

Luke 21:15

Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist.”

Spiritual Principle

Formal education has value, but no education can substitute for knowing Christ and being filled with His Spirit.

Application

The question is not merely:

“What degrees do you have?”

But also:

“Have you been with Jesus?”

XIV. THE EVIDENCE WAS STANDING THERE

Acts 4:14

“But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.”

The leaders could argue with Peter.

But the healed man stood beside him.

Cross References

Acts 3:10

The people recognized him as the same man who had sat begging at the Beautiful Gate, and they were filled with wonder at what had happened.

John 9:25

The man who had been blind said, “Whether He is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind, but now I can see.”

Titus 2:8

Speak with soundness that cannot be condemned so that anyone opposing you may be ashamed because there is nothing bad to say about us.

Spiritual Principle

A transformed life can become powerful evidence that is difficult to dismiss.

XV. THE COUNCIL CONFERS PRIVATELY

Acts 4:15

“So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.”

The leaders needed to decide how to respond.

Cross References

John 11:47

The chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we doing? This man performs many signs.”

Matthew 27:1

Early in the morning all the chief priests and elders of the people made plans concerning Jesus.

Psalms 2:2

The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

XVI. THEY COULD NOT DENY THE MIRACLE

Acts 4:16

“What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a remarkable sign, and we cannot deny it.”

This statement is striking.

The leaders did not claim the miracle was fake.

They admitted:

“We cannot deny it.”

Cross References

John 11:47

The religious leaders said, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many miraculous signs.”

John 12:19

The Pharisees said to one another, “Look, we are accomplishing nothing. The whole world is going after Him.”

John 3:2

Nicodemus told Jesus, “We know You have come from God as a teacher, because no one could perform the signs You do unless God were with him.”

Spiritual Warning

Evidence alone does not always produce faith.

A hardened heart can acknowledge evidence while still resisting its implications.

XVII. THEY TRY TO SILENCE THE NAME OF JESUS

Acts 4:17

“But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

Their concern was not truth.

Their concern was stopping the message from spreading.

Cross References

Acts 5:28

The high priest said, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.”

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak anymore in His name,’ His Word becomes like a fire burning in my heart and shut up in my bones. I become weary trying to hold it in, and I cannot.”

Matthew 10:18

Jesus said, “Because of Me you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the nations.”

Spiritual Principle

The world often tolerates religion until religion clearly proclaims the authority of Jesus Christ.

XVIII. THE COUNCIL COMMANDS SILENCE

Acts 4:18

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

The command was clear.

No preaching.

No teaching.

No Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 5:40

The council called the apostles in, had them beaten, and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:28

The leaders said, “We strictly ordered you not to teach in this name.”

Jeremiah 26:8

After Jeremiah finished saying everything the Lord commanded him to say, the priests, prophets, and people seized him and said, “You must die!”

Spiritual Principle

There are moments when obedience to God creates unavoidable conflict with human authority.

XIX. OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Acts 4:19

“But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges!’”

Peter and John recognize a hierarchy of authority.

Human authorities have real authority.

But human authority is never higher than God's authority.

Cross References

Acts 5:29

Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than human beings.”

Exodus 1:17

But the Hebrew midwives feared God and did not obey the king of Egypt's command to kill the male babies.

Daniel 3:18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, “Even if God does not rescue us, understand, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.”

Important Principle

Christians should respect lawful authority, but when human authority directly commands disobedience to God, obedience to God comes first.

XX. “WE CANNOT HELP SPEAKING”

Acts 4:20

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Peter and John were eyewitnesses.

They had seen:

Jesus' ministry.

His crucifixion.

His resurrection.

His ascension.

They could not pretend these things had never happened.

Cross References

1 John 1:3

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “God's Word is like a fire within me. I grow tired of trying to hold it in, and I cannot.”

1 Corinthians 9:16

Paul said, “If I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast because I am compelled to do it. How terrible it would be for me if I did not preach the gospel.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A heart convinced of the gospel cannot remain permanently silent about Christ.

XXI. THE APOSTLES ARE RELEASED

Acts 4:21

“After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.”

The leaders threatened them but released them.

Public reaction made punishment difficult.

Cross References

Acts 5:26

The captain and officers brought the apostles without using force because they feared the people might stone them.

Luke 20:19

The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus immediately, but they feared the people.

Matthew 21:46

They looked for a way to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people regarded Him as a prophet.

Spiritual Principle

God can restrain opposition through circumstances even when opponents remain hostile.

XXII. THE MAN WAS OVER FORTY YEARS OLD

Acts 4:22

“For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”

Luke emphasizes the duration of the man's disability.

He had never walked for more than forty years.

Cross References

Acts 3:2

A man who had been lame from birth was carried daily to the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg.

Acts 9:33

Peter found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years because he was paralyzed.

Acts 14:8

In Lystra there sat a man who had been unable to walk from birth.

Key Truth

The miracle was unmistakable because the man's condition was longstanding and publicly known.

XXIII. PETER AND JOHN RETURN TO THE CHURCH

Acts 4:23

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.”

When Peter and John were released, they returned to the believers.

They did not isolate themselves.

They went back to their spiritual community.

Cross References

Acts 12:12

Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people were gathered and praying.

Acts 15:4

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, apostles, and elders, and they reported everything God had done through them.

Mark 6:30

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported everything they had done and taught.

Spiritual Principle

Believers need spiritual community especially after seasons of opposition.

XXIV. THE CHURCH RESPONDS WITH PRAYER

Acts 4:24

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘You made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.’”

The believers respond to threats by praying.

Their prayer begins not with the size of their enemies but with the greatness of God.

Cross References

Exodus 20:11

In six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and He rested on the seventh day.

Nehemiah 9:6

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, the highest heavens and all their stars, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them. You give life to everything.

Psalms 146:6

The Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. He remains faithful forever.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer becomes stronger when fear is replaced by a fresh vision of God's sovereignty.

They did not begin:

“Lord, look how powerful the Sanhedrin is.”

They began:

“You made heaven and earth.”

XXV. SCRIPTURE EXPLAINS THEIR OPPOSITION

Acts 4:25

“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’”

The church interprets opposition through Psalm 2.

Cross References

Psalm 2:1

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plan something that will never succeed?

2 Peter 1:21

Prophecy never came from human will, but holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Samuel 23:2

David said, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me, and His Word was on my tongue.”

Key Truth

The early church believed Scripture was spoken by the Holy Spirit through human authors.

XXVI. THE RULERS OPPOSE GOD'S ANOINTED ONE

Acts 4:26

“The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.”

The opposition against Christ fulfilled the pattern described in Psalm 2.

Cross References

Psalm 2:2

The kings of the earth take their stand, and rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

Luke 23:12

Herod and Pilate became friends that day, although they had previously been enemies.

Revelation 19:19

John saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against the One sitting on the horse and against His army.

Spiritual Principle

Human opposition against Christ ultimately becomes opposition against God Himself.

XXVII. HEROD AND PILATE FULFIL THE PATTERN

Acts 4:27

“Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed.”

Different groups united against Jesus.

Herod.

Pilate.

Gentiles.

Israelite leaders.

Cross References

Luke 23:12

Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that day, though they had previously been enemies.

Matthew 27:2

They bound Jesus, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate the governor.

Psalm 2:2

The rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

Spiritual Principle

People divided by many other issues can become strangely united in opposition to Christ.

XXVIII. GOD REMAINS SOVEREIGN

Acts 4:28

“They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

This verse teaches God's sovereignty over the crucifixion.

The conspirators acted willingly and wickedly.

Yet their actions did not surprise God or derail His plan.

Cross References

Acts 2:23

Jesus was handed over according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, and wicked people crucified and killed Him.

Ephesians 1:11

In Christ we received an inheritance according to the plan of the One who works everything according to the purpose of His will.

Isaiah 46:10

The Lord says, “I declare the end from the beginning and tell what will happen before it occurs. My purpose will stand, and I will accomplish everything I desire.”

Spiritual Principle

Human opposition never places God's ultimate purposes in danger.

God is never surprised.

God is never outmaneuvered.

XXIX. THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR BOLDNESS

Acts 4:29

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness.”

This may be one of the most challenging prayers in Acts.

They do not primarily pray:

“Remove every threat.”

They pray:

“Make us bold.”

Cross References

Ephesians 6:19

Paul said, “Pray also for me, that words may be given to me whenever I speak so that I may boldly make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Philippians 1:14

Because of Paul's imprisonment, many believers became more confident in the Lord and dared to speak God's Word without fear.

Acts 4:31

After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's Word boldly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The early church did not pray merely for easier circumstances. It prayed for greater faithfulness within difficult circumstances.

XXX. THEY ASK GOD TO CONTINUE WORKING

Acts 4:30

“Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

They ask God to continue confirming the gospel through His power.

Cross References

Acts 5:12

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through accompanying signs.

Acts 14:3

Paul and Barnabas remained there a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by allowing signs and wonders through their hands.

Spiritual Principle

The church sought power not for entertainment but for the advancement of the gospel.

XXXI. THE PLACE IS SHAKEN

Acts 4:31

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

God answers their prayer.

The place shakes.

They are filled with the Spirit.

And the result is exactly what they requested:

Bold proclamation.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 16:26

Suddenly there was a powerful earthquake, and the prison foundations were shaken. The doors opened, and everyone's chains came loose.

Acts 2:2

Suddenly a sound like a powerful rushing wind came from heaven and filled the entire house.

Key Truth

The evidence of Spirit-filled boldness is faithful proclamation of God's Word.

XXXII. THE BELIEVERS ARE ONE IN HEART AND MIND

Acts 4:32

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”

Opposition outside the church produced deeper unity inside the church.

Cross References

Acts 2:44

All the believers were together and shared what they had with one another.

Acts 2:45

They sold property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to anyone who had need.

Philippians 2:2

Make my joy complete by being united in mind, having the same love, being one in spirit, and sharing one purpose.

Spiritual Principle

Christian unity is deeper than organizational cooperation. It involves shared love, shared purpose, and shared devotion to Christ.

XXXIII. GREAT POWER AND GREAT GRACE

Acts 4:33

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.”

Two phrases stand together:

Great power.

Great grace.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

1 Corinthians 15:15

If Christ had not been raised, the apostles would have been false witnesses because they testified that God raised Christ.

Acts 6:8

Stephen, full of faith and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A powerful church should also be a gracious church.

Power without grace can become harshness.

Grace without truth can become weakness.

The early church displayed both.

XXXIV. THERE WERE NO NEEDY PEOPLE AMONG THEM

Acts 4:34

“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales—”

Their unity became practical generosity.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 15:4

There should be no poor person among you, because the Lord will richly bless you in the land He gives you.

Acts 2:45

The believers sold possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to anyone who had need.

Acts 5:1

A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property.

Important Truth

The selling of property was voluntary.

Acts 5 makes this clear.

The believers were not forced to surrender ownership.

Their generosity flowed from love.

Spiritual Principle

Grace loosens the grip of possessions upon the heart.

XXXV. DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO NEED

Acts 4:35

“And put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

Resources were distributed according to actual need.

Cross References

Acts 2:45

They sold property and possessions and gave to anyone according to that person's need.

Acts 5:2

Ananias kept back part of the money for himself, with his wife's knowledge, and brought the rest and placed it at the apostles' feet.

2 Corinthians 8:14

At the present time your abundance can supply their need, and later their abundance may supply your need so there may be fairness.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical generosity seeks to relieve genuine need.

XXXVI. BARNABAS — THE SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Acts 4:36

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means ‘son of encouragement’—”

Barnabas enters the story.

His original name was Joseph.

But the apostles gave him a name reflecting his character:

Barnabas — Son of Encouragement.

Cross References

Acts 9:27

Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. He explained how Saul had seen the Lord and how he had preached boldly in Damascus in Jesus' name.

Acts 11:24

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

Acts 13:2

While the church was worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Spiritual Principle

The church needs encouragers.

Barnabas would later encourage:

Saul.

John Mark.

Gentile believers.

Missionary churches.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some of the most important people in ministry are those who strengthen others so they can fulfill God's calling.

XXXVII. BARNABAS GIVES GENEROUSLY

Acts 4:37

“Sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Barnabas demonstrates the generosity described in the previous verses.

Cross References

Acts 5:1

Ananias and Sapphira also sold property, though their story would reveal a very different heart.

Acts 2:45

The believers sold property and possessions to meet the needs of others.

Leviticus 25:23

The Lord said, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land belongs to Me, and you are foreigners and temporary residents with Me.”

Spiritual Principle

Barnabas' generosity flowed from a heart that valued people above possessions.

His example also prepares for the contrast with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

XXXVIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 4

1. The Resurrection Is Central to the Gospel

The apostles were persecuted because they proclaimed resurrection in Jesus.

Principle:

Christianity cannot be separated from the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Salvation Is Found in Christ Alone

Peter declared:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

Principle:

Jesus Christ is not merely a helpful religious teacher. He is the only Savior.

3. Ordinary People Can Be Used Extraordinary Ways

Peter and John were described as ordinary men.

Yet their boldness astonished the council.

Principle:

God does not require celebrity status before He can use someone powerfully.

4. Being with Jesus Changes People

The council recognized:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Principle:

Time spent with Christ should become visible in our character, courage, and speech.

5. God Must Be Obeyed Above Human Authority

Peter and John refused to stop preaching.

Principle:

When human commands contradict God's commands, believers must remain faithful to God.

6. Prayer Produces Boldness

The church prayed.

God answered.

They spoke the Word boldly.

Principle:

Prayer is not an escape from mission; prayer empowers mission.

7. Grace Produces Generosity

The believers willingly shared.

Principle:

A church transformed by grace should become compassionate toward real needs.

XXXIX. THE TRANSFORMATION OF PETER

The boldness of Peter deserves special attention.

Only a short time earlier:

Peter had denied Jesus.

He had feared a servant girl.

He had denied knowing Christ three times.

Now he stands before the most powerful religious court in Jerusalem and declares:

Jesus Christ is risen.

Jesus Christ healed this man.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone.

Jesus Christ is the only Savior.

What changed?

Peter Had Seen the Risen Christ

The resurrection transformed his understanding.

Peter Had Been Restored by Christ

Jesus forgave and recommissioned him.

Peter Had Received the Holy Spirit

Acts 4:8 specifically says Peter was filled with the Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God can transform fear into boldness when a surrendered believer depends upon the Holy Spirit.

XL. “THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS”

This may be one of the greatest descriptions any Christian could receive.

The council did not say:

They were wealthy.

They were influential.

They were highly educated.

They were politically powerful.

They said:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Application

What do people recognize about us?

Do they recognize:

Christlike compassion?

Biblical conviction?

Humility?

Courage?

Truth?

Grace?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The greatest qualification for Christian influence is a life unmistakably shaped by fellowship with Jesus Christ.

XLI. WHAT ACTS 4 TEACHES ABOUT PERSECUTION

The apostles experienced opposition almost immediately.

This teaches us several truths.

Persecution Does Not Mean God Has Abandoned His People

Peter and John were obeying God when they were arrested.

Persecution Can Create Witnessing Opportunities

The arrest placed Peter before the Sanhedrin.

Persecution Can Strengthen Prayer

The church prayed more deeply.

Persecution Can Increase Boldness

They asked God for courage.

Persecution Cannot Stop the Gospel

Thousands continued believing.

Key Truth

Opposition does not automatically mean the mission is failing. Sometimes opposition appears because the mission is succeeding.

XLII. THE PRAYER OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Acts 4:24–30 provides one of Scripture's great models of prayer under pressure.

They Began with God's Sovereignty

“Sovereign Lord.”

They Remembered Creation

God made everything.

They Prayed Scripture

They quoted Psalm 2.

They Interpreted Opposition Biblically

Their enemies were not outside God's control.

They Trusted God's Sovereignty

The cross itself had occurred within God's predetermined plan.

They Acknowledged the Threat

They did not pretend danger was imaginary.

They Asked for Boldness

This was their greatest request.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical prayer does not deny the threat; it places the threat beneath the sovereignty of God.

XLIII. WHAT THEY DID NOT PRAY

It is instructive to notice what is missing.

They did not primarily pray:

“Lord, destroy the Sanhedrin.”

They did not pray:

“Lord, make everyone like us.”

They did not pray:

“Lord, remove every difficult circumstance.”

They prayed:

“Enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.”

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes the most important prayer is not:

“Lord, change my circumstances.”

But:

“Lord, make me faithful in these circumstances.”

XLIV. HOLY SPIRIT BOLDNESS

Acts 4:31 demonstrates what biblical boldness looks like.

They were filled with the Spirit.

Then:

“They spoke the Word of God boldly.”

Boldness is not:

Rudeness.

Anger.

Pride.

Argumentativeness.

Insensitivity.

Biblical boldness is:

Courageous faithfulness to God's truth despite opposition.

Principle

Boldness speaks truth without surrendering love.

XLV. THE CHURCH WAS UNITED

Acts 4:32 says:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”

This does not mean every believer had identical personalities or opinions about every minor matter.

Their unity was centered around:

Christ.

The gospel.

The mission.

Love for one another.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical unity is not uniformity. It is shared devotion to Christ and His purposes.

XLVI. GREAT POWER AND GREAT GRACE

Acts 4:33 gives a beautiful description:

“Great power.”

And:

“Great grace.”

Some people want power without grace.

Others talk about grace without spiritual power.

The early church had both.

Power

They testified boldly to the resurrection.

Grace

They cared deeply for one another.

Principle

A Spirit-filled church should be strong in truth and rich in grace.

XLVII. BARNABAS — THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Barnabas becomes one of the most important supporting figures in Acts.

His ministry reminds us that not every powerful ministry takes place in front of a crowd.

Barnabas would later stand beside Saul when others feared him.

He would recognize God's work among Gentile believers.

He would travel as a missionary.

He would give John Mark another opportunity after failure.

Spiritual Principle

Encouragement can change the course of another person's ministry.

Application

Ask yourself:

Who is stronger in Christ because I encouraged them?

XLVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why were the Sadducees disturbed by Peter and John's preaching?

The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead.

Peter and John were publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen and that resurrection was real.

Their message directly challenged Sadducean theology and authority.

Question 2

Did the apostles' arrest stop people from believing?

No.

Acts 4:4 says many who heard the message believed, and the number of men reached about five thousand.

This demonstrates that opposition could not prevent God's Word from bearing fruit.

Question 3

What gave Peter courage before the Sanhedrin?

Acts 4:8 says:

“Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit.”

His courage flowed from dependence upon God.

Jesus had promised that the Spirit would help His followers when they stood before hostile authorities.

Question 4

What does Acts 4:12 teach about salvation?

It teaches that salvation is found exclusively in Jesus Christ.

There is no other name given by God through which sinners must be saved.

Christian salvation is therefore Christ-centered.

Question 5

Why were the religious leaders amazed at Peter and John?

They recognized that Peter and John were ordinary men without elite religious education.

Yet these men spoke with extraordinary courage and wisdom.

The leaders recognized that:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Question 6

Why could the council not deny the miracle?

The healed man was standing there.

His disability had been publicly known for decades.

Everyone knew a remarkable sign had occurred.

The leaders themselves admitted that they could not deny it.

Question 7

What did Peter and John mean when they said they must listen to God rather than men?

They recognized that human authority is subordinate to divine authority.

Normally Christians should respect lawful authorities.

However, when authorities command believers to disobey a direct command from God, loyalty to God must come first.

Question 8

Why did Peter and John refuse to stop preaching?

They had personally witnessed the reality of Jesus Christ.

They had seen His ministry.

They had seen Him risen.

They had received His commission.

Therefore they said:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Question 9

What did the believers pray for after Peter and John were threatened?

They prayed for boldness to continue speaking God's Word.

This reveals their priorities.

They were more concerned about faithfulness than comfort.

Question 10

What happened after the believers prayed?

The place where they were gathered was shaken.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke God's Word boldly.

God directly answered the central request of their prayer.

Question 11

What does Acts 4 teach about Christian unity?

The believers were described as one in heart and mind.

Their unity resulted in practical generosity.

They viewed their possessions as resources God could use to help fellow believers.

Question 12

Who was Barnabas?

Barnabas was originally named Joseph.

He was a Levite from Cyprus.

The apostles called him Barnabas, meaning:

“Son of Encouragement.”

He demonstrated generosity by selling a field and donating the proceeds.

He would later become an important encourager, missionary, and ministry partner.

XLIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 4 asks us several serious questions.

Would I Remain Faithful Under Opposition?

Peter and John refused to stop speaking about Jesus.

Is Jesus Clearly Central to My Understanding of Salvation?

Peter said:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

Can People Tell That I Have Been with Jesus?

Does time with Christ shape my life?

Am I More Concerned About Human Approval or God's Approval?

Peter and John chose obedience to God.

What Do I Pray for When Pressure Comes?

Only escape?

Or boldness?

Am I Connected to Other Believers?

Peter and John immediately returned to their church family.

Am I Generous?

Does grace affect the way I use my resources?

Am I an Encourager?

Who am I helping become stronger in Christ?

L. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Ask God Merely to Remove the Opposition—Ask Him to Increase Your Boldness”

The church faced real threats.

The religious leaders had authority.

Peter and John had already spent a night in jail.

Future persecution could become much worse.

Yet the believers did not primarily pray:

“Make everything easy.”

They prayed:

“Enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.”

That is spiritual maturity.

They understood:

The mission mattered more than comfort.

Faithfulness mattered more than popularity.

The gospel mattered more than safety.

Principle

Courage is not the absence of opposition. Courage is faithfulness to Christ within opposition.

LI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 4 begins with opposition and ends with generosity.

It begins with apostles being arrested.

It ends with believers being united.

It begins with religious leaders trying to silence the name of Jesus.

It ends with the church speaking God's Word boldly.

The chapter reveals a church that could not be easily intimidated.

Why?

Because they believed Jesus was alive.

They knew the resurrection was true.

They believed salvation was found in Christ alone.

They knew God was sovereign.

They understood Scripture.

They prayed.

They depended upon the Holy Spirit.

They loved one another.

And they refused to stop speaking about Jesus.

That combination is powerful.

A church does not become courageous merely by becoming louder.

A church becomes courageous by becoming convinced.

Convinced that Jesus is Lord.

Convinced that Jesus rose.

Convinced that salvation is in Christ alone.

Convinced that God's Word is true.

Convinced that God's sovereignty is greater than human opposition.

Convinced that prayer matters.

Convinced that the Holy Spirit empowers witness.

Then the church can say:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Acts 4 challenges every believer:

Do not allow fear to silence truth.

Do not allow opposition to weaken faith.

Do not allow human authority to replace divine authority.

Do not allow suffering to isolate you from the church.

Do not allow possessions to control your heart.

Do not allow ministry success to replace dependence upon prayer.

And above everything:

Stay close enough to Jesus that people can tell you have been with Him.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the courage You gave Peter and John.

Thank You that when they stood before powerful leaders, Your Holy Spirit gave them wisdom and boldness.

Give us that same commitment to truth.

Help us never be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

Give us confidence to proclaim clearly that salvation is found in Him alone.

Keep us from compromising the gospel because we fear rejection, criticism, ridicule, or opposition.

Make our lives reflect time spent with Jesus.

May people see Christlike love in us.

May they see biblical conviction.

May they see humility.

May they see courage.

When authorities or culture pressure us to disobey You, give us wisdom to respond respectfully but faithfully.

Teach us to say with Peter and John:

“We must obey God.”

When opposition comes, teach us how to pray.

Keep us from asking only for easier circumstances.

Give us courage to ask for greater boldness.

Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Help us speak Your Word faithfully.

Make our churches united in heart and mind.

Remove selfishness.

Teach us generosity.

Open our eyes to believers who have genuine needs.

Raise up more Barnabases—men and women who encourage, strengthen, support, and restore others.

Thank You that human opposition cannot defeat Your purposes.

Thank You that the gospel cannot be imprisoned.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is risen.

And thank You that there is salvation in His name.

Give us grace to remain faithful until Christ returns.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” — Acts 4:12

Central Truth

The risen Jesus Christ is the only Savior, and believers filled with the Holy Spirit are called to proclaim Him boldly, obey God above human pressure, pray courageously, live in unity, and care generously for one another.

Acts 4 in One Sentence

When Peter and John are arrested for proclaiming the resurrection, they boldly testify that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, refuse to be silenced, and return to a praying, Spirit-filled, united, and generous church that continues speaking God's Word with courage.