



Peter & John Will Not Be Silent

FAMILIES IN TRUTH

Acts 4



Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter and John preached boldly about Jesus. They performed miracles in Jesus' name. The religious leaders tried to stop Peter and John from proclaiming the truth. But the two disciples would not be silent. They LISTENED to the command Jesus had given them, and relied on God's Holy Spirit.

Day #1: Arrested

Last week we studied the story of the crippled beggar who was healed when Peter and John called upon the powerful name of Jesus (Acts 3:1-10). Peter preached to all those who saw the miracle. Peter told the people they must turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus.



The priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to the apostles. They were very upset by what the apostles were teaching the people. The apostles were saying that because Jesus rose from the dead, people can be raised from the dead. So the temple authorities arrested Peter and John. It was already evening, so they put them in prison until the next day. But many who heard the message believed. The number of men who believed grew to about 5,000.

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest, was there. So were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others in the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought to them. They wanted to question them. - Acts 4:1b-7a

Remember, there was a scene very similar to this several weeks earlier. It was when Jesus was arrested and questioned by the religious leaders. Peter and John stood right next to Jesus when He was arrested. It was a very frightening time for the disciples. It was during Jesus' questioning that Peter said he did not even know Jesus. And what happened to Jesus right after He was questioned? (He was put to death on a cross.) Now, Peter and John were the ones who were arrested and taken to be questioned. They were taken to the **same** men who had first questioned Jesus (John 18:24). It might seem that Peter would have even more reason to fear now, because he had seen Jesus hanging on the cross. This time, however, Peter reacted quite differently. (We will read his response on Day #3.) This time, Peter did NOT deny knowing Jesus. Peter answered their questions by speaking **boldly** about the power of Jesus. What was different this time?

Acts 4:8 tells us that, "**Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.**" Jesus had told His disciples that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to live inside each of them. In fact, the Holy Spirit was so important that Jesus told the disciples NOT to leave Jerusalem until God sent the Holy Spirit to them (Acts 1:4-5). Jesus told His disciples, "**You will receive power** when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." (Acts 1:8a NLT) Then, and only then, would they be ready to tell everyone about Jesus (Acts 1:8b, Mark 13:11).



Did you know that God sends the SAME Holy Spirit that filled Peter and John, to live inside each of Jesus' followers today? If you have put your trust in Jesus, YOU have been given the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8)!

You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that you belong to God. - Ephesians 1:13b (CEV)

Day #2: Blinded by Pride

The Bible tells us that the religious leaders, called Pharisees and Sadducees, were very angry with Peter and John because they were preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:2). Let's look at the reason for their anger. Just before Peter and John were arrested, they were proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, or Savior, that God had promised long ago (Acts 3:20).

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Consider the source"? It means when you hear a person say something, you must think about who said it. Is the person a wise person who is known for telling the truth? Or is the person foolish or known for telling lies? For instance, you might have a friend at school who is always trying to trick people. If he told you that your teacher was going to give everyone in your class a cupcake after lunch, would you believe him? Probably not. On the other hand, if your teacher announced that she was going to give everyone a cupcake, you would believe her. Why would you believe your teacher, but not your friend? Because you would have "considered the source," or thought about who was speaking. You know your teacher always tells the truth, but that friend rarely does.

Jesus taught many things that the Jewish religious leaders did not like. Jesus taught that NO ONE was good enough to gain eternal life on their own. He told the truth about the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus said they instructed others how to live rightly, but they did not live rightly themselves (Matthew 23:3-7). These leaders called Jesus a liar because they wanted people to think Jesus was a source that could NOT be trusted (Matthew 26:65). Then the people would continue to follow them and make them feel important. Just the opposite, if the people knew Jesus was the Messiah, He would have been the BEST source - one that could be trusted above all others. The religious leaders were angry at Peter and John for saying Jesus was the Messiah, because if Jesus **was** the Messiah:

- He was right when He said they were proud and selfish men.
- They were wrong to call Him a liar.
- The leaders were wrong not to believe in Him.
- The leaders would have to admit that they killed God's Son.
- The leaders would have to admit that Jesus was perfect and they were not. They would have to admit they were not good enough to gain eternal life. They would have to admit they needed God's provision of Christ's shed blood.



Ultimately, it was their PRIDE that caused the religious leaders' anger at Peter and John's preaching. Psalm 10:4 says, "Because he is proud, that evil person doesn't turn to the Lord. There is no room for God in any of his thoughts."

Pride is thinking that we know how to live our lives better than God does. Author, C. S. Lewis, called pride, "The complete anti-God state of mind." It was pride that caused the devil to rebel against God. More than anything else, it is PRIDE that keeps people from believing in Jesus today. Ask God to remove the pride in your life.

Day #3: Tough Questions

Let's try to get a picture of how it felt to be Peter and John on the day they were arrested for preaching the truth about Jesus. Imagine one day you are telling a friend about how important Jesus is to you. All of a sudden, a big group of police officers come up and grab you. They are very angry, and they throw you in jail for the night. The next morning, they drag you into the middle of a big room where the mayor and the governor are ready to fire questions at you. You look around and see armed guards at each door. How would you feel, in this room with all these powerful people? Would you feel scared, weak, or lonely?

Day #3 continued:

Jesus did not want His followers to feel scared, or weak. Before He died on the cross, Jesus told His disciples that they would one day be put on trial and questioned about Him. But, He told them not to worry, because the Holy Spirit would do the talking! Jesus said:

But when you are arrested and stand trial, don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit. - Mark 13:11 NLT

The men who questioned Peter and John held the most important positions in the Jewish nation. These powerful leaders questioned the two disciples about healing the beggar. They demanded to know, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?" (Acts 4:7 NLT)

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people! Are you asking us to explain our actions today? Do you want to know why we were kind to a disabled man? Are you asking how he was healed? Then listen to this, you and all the people of Israel! You nailed Jesus Christ of Nazareth to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead. It is through Jesus' name that this man stands healed in front of you." - Acts 4:8-10

Peter also said: *There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.* - Acts 4:12 NLT

These were not the words of a scared, weak man. These were the words given by the Holy Spirit! Peter rightly accused the men in front of him of killing God's Son, and Peter proclaimed that they must believe in that Son in order to be saved from eternal punishment.

Just like Peter, we can have confidence to speak the truth. God promises that the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of all believers, is more powerful than anyone in the world.

The One who is in you is more powerful than the one who is in the world. - 1 John 4:4b

Day #4: We Will Not Stop

The Holy Spirit gave Peter just the right words to answer the questions of the Jewish leaders. So, how did the leaders respond to Peter's answers?

The leaders saw how bold Peter and John were. They also realized that Peter and John were ordinary men with no training. This surprised the leaders. They realized that these men had been with Jesus. The leaders could see the man who had been healed standing there with them. So there was nothing they could say. - Acts 4:13-14

The Sadducees had nothing to say! The Bible tells us that the arguments of men cannot stand against the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10). The leaders had gotten themselves into a difficult situation. They wanted to say that Peter and John were just making up stories and telling lies, but Peter and John had **proof** of the power of Jesus. The man who had been crippled all of his life was healed! He was standing right in front of the leaders. The questioners told Peter and John to leave the room so they could discuss what to do with them.

"What can we do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle. We can't say it didn't happen. We have to stop this thing. It must not spread any further among the people. We have to warn these men. They must never speak to anyone in Jesus' name again." - Acts 4:16-17

Then the leaders called Peter and John back into the room. They demanded that the two disciples never preach or teach in Jesus' name again.

*But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than Him? **We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.**"* - Acts 4:19-20 NLT

Peter and John continued to speak boldly, even though the men they spoke to had the power to punish them. The very last words Jesus

Day #4 continued:

spoke to His disciples, before He returned to heaven, were instructions for them to go and tell people about Him. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere - in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8b NLT) If they had agreed to stop preaching in Jesus name, Peter and John would have disobeyed Jesus' command. These two men trusted Jesus fully, and because of the power of the Holy Spirit, nothing could stop them from sharing the good news about their Savior.

The words Jesus spoke to the disciples are also instructions for us today. Everywhere we go, we are to tell the good news of Jesus' sacrifice and the forgiveness of sin. Discuss times or places where you may be asked not to talk about Jesus. How can you respond? (Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the words to speak, Mark 13:11; pray for those who tell you not to speak, Matthew 5:44)

Day #5: Power IN Persecution

The Sadducees and priests threatened Peter and John several more times. However, they finally let the two men go. The leaders were afraid to punish them because all of the people were praising God for the miracle they had performed.

Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them all that God had done. The people were overjoyed and they lifted their voices to God in prayer. They praised God for Who He is and the mighty things He had done. They quoted Scripture from the Psalms that foretold that rulers would try to stand against the true Messiah. They remembered that Herod and Pilate, along with the Jews and non-Jews, all stood together against Jesus and put Him to death. But they acknowledged that all of these things were part of God's plan.

Then, the people turned their thoughts to the threats they were now facing from the religious leaders. What do you think the people prayed about those threats? What would you pray? Would you pray for God to stop the people who making threats against God's followers?

*And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and **give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching Your word.** Stretch out Your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."* - Acts 4:29-30 NLT

The believers did not pray for the threats to stop. They prayed that they would be bold in preaching! They knew Jesus had told His followers they would be persecuted because of their belief in Him (Matthew 5:11, Mark 13:11). Persecution is being made fun of, treated badly, or physically harmed. The believers trusted that God would always be with them (Matthew 28:20). They believed that God's Holy Spirit would give them the wisdom and the power they needed.

We see in this story that the persecution Peter and John faced actually helped the good news to spread. **After** they were arrested, even more people believed their message (Acts 4:3-4). Persecution CANNOT have victory over the gospel. Persecution often helps the gospel to spread (Acts 8:1-8).

Does it seem strange that God would use something as bad as persecution to spread His truth? Let's look at modern day example. In the country of Vietnam, the government does not approve of Christianity. Christian leaders are often arrested and falsely accused of causing trouble for the government. One such leader, Brother K'Be, was put on television, and called a criminal. This charge was untrue, and would seem to be a very bad thing. However, God used this situation for good when many people who saw him on TV began to ask him about his beliefs. Brother K'Be was happy to have even more opportunities to tell people about Jesus!

Our God is awesome! He can even take the evil intents of men and use them for good. When you are persecuted for your faith in Jesus, ask God to use your situation to spread His truth.

You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good. He planned to do what is now being done. He wanted to save many lives. - Genesis 50:20