

Avoiding Hesitation through Expectation

Acts 4: 23-31

This morning I would like to continue considering the challenges and responsibilities associated with sharing the gospel. Last week we considered *The Mandate of the Message*, and dealt with the **Communication**, **Controversy**, and **Conviction** related to the message. After Peter and John were arrested for preaching the gospel, they were brought before the Sanhedrin the following morning. Rather than shying away in fear, they stood courageous in the face of persecution, preaching the gospel to those who rejected Christ and consented to His death. [Acts 4:12 – Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.](#) Peter and John were then threatened with further punishment if they continued to preach Jesus among the people.

The Sanhedrin did not receive the message, but they were forced to recognize the boldness of Peter and John, as well as their commitment to Christ. [Acts 4:13 – Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.](#)

Fear and doubt create a great hindrance to sharing the gospel. Granted we have not faced the severity of persecution the apostles did or what others face in foreign lands today, but many refuse to engage the lost for fear of ridicule, mockery, or rejection. We need the boldness Peter and John possessed, and really there is no reason for us not to possess such boldness. John Wesley said, *"Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I will shake the world. I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; and such alone will overthrow the kingdom of Satan and build up the Kingdom of God on earth."*ⁱ

Let's take a few moments to consider the [circumstances](#) surrounding this situation as we think on: [Avoiding Hesitation through Expectation](#).

I. The Difficulty of the Apostles (23-28)

A. The Severity of their Difficulty (23) – [And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.](#) We dealt with this at length last week, but I want to remind us of the opposition they faced for simply sharing the gospel. The religious leaders of that day opposed their preaching of Jesus. They were threatened in hopes of creating fear within their hearts and silencing their voices. Peter and John shared this with those who had received Christ and sought to follow Him. They wanted them to be aware of the extent of the opposition.

- We too might as well expect opposition if we are committed to sharing the gospel. The enemy will do little to hinder those who are idle, but he will do all he can to discourage and defeat those who are faithful to the Lord and the kingdom work.

B. The Sovereign in their Difficulty (24-28) – Here we discover a prayer of faith offered unto the Lord. In this prayer the people acknowledged several of God’s divine attributes. They recognized:

1. His Power (24) – *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:* The people praised the Lord for His almighty power. They believed that He was the God of heaven, the Creator of heaven, earth, and all they contain. Surely they recognized the influence and authority the Sanhedrin had among men, but they also recognized the sovereign power of their God.

- We can rejoice and take comfort in the power of our God as well. We serve the same God that Peter and the others did. He enabled them to overcome and He can provide what we need as well. The enemy has power, and we will face great hindrances, but we serve One who holds power over all things!

2. His Preeminence (25-27) – *Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? [26] The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. [27] For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.* Here they were reminded of David’s pondering (Psalm 2) of the prosperity of the wicked and their opposition to all that was godly and righteous. Each generation had experienced those of power and influence who opposed the Word and work of the Lord, but God had prevailed. Every generation faced adversity, but every generation produced believers as well.

- Down through the ages of time, men have stood against the Lord, but He has always endured. The world may seek to silence the message of the gospel; they may deny and reject Christ as Lord. We will be faced with adversity, but we serve a preeminent Lord. He is not subject to the wicked desires of men. Their rejection and opposition will never challenge His deity!

3. His Providence (28) – *For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.* The people rejoiced in the divine providence of God. Throughout history men had opposed the Lord. In their generation Herod and Pilate stood against Christ. The world may have thought they had accomplished their purpose, but they were pawns in the hand of God, used of Him.

- We ought to rejoice in that this morning as well. The Sanhedrin thought they had removed the blasphemer from among them. Herod thought he had guaranteed his continued reign. Pilate thought he had gained the favor of the Jews by consenting to the death of Christ. But, behind the scenes, the eternal plan of God was being fulfilled. These were not circumstances that came about by chance. A sovereign God was orchestrating the events to fulfill redemption's plan!
- We know that we are commanded to share the gospel and live for Christ in the midst of a wicked and sinful world. Opposition and hindrances will come, but God can use every circumstance to accomplish his divine purpose. What have we to fear?

I. The Difficulty of the Apostles (23-28)

II. The Desire of the Apostles (29-30) – Take a moment to consider their noble desires. We see:

A. They Desired Conviction (29a) – *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings:* This has the idea of “*looking upon the evil done to them unfavorably.*” They were seeking the Lord to deal with the hearts of those who had persecuted them. They desired the Lord to convict them of their sin and show them the error of their ways, even if it involved judgment.

- We have lost conviction in our day. Folks can live as they please and feel no remorse or conviction whatsoever. We need to pray that God would bring conviction to the hearts of those who indulge in sin and hinder the work of the Lord. I do not wish anyone to die lost, but we discover a biblical principle to pray that God would deal with the hearts of those who stand against us. Sharing the gospel with the lost must be the priority, even if it involves the judgment of God.

B. They Desired Courage (29b) – *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.* The apostles had been persecuted and threatened, but they had not resigned to defeat. Many would have questioned whether the effort was worth the sacrifice, but they were determined to continue for the Lord. They did not seek the Lord to remove the adversity, but to grant them the boldness to face it and continue to share the truth with those who needed to hear.

- I think most of us would have to admit that we could use more boldness as well. We often look at the circumstances around us and assume that we will never overcome. We hear the voice of opposition and resign to defeat. We need to seek the Lord to fill us with a holy boldness that will not cower to the demands of this world.

- Our religious freedoms continue to diminish. We are continually told that we can't speak of our faith in certain places or settings. Those in places of leadership seek to silence the message of the gospel through fear, intimidation, and outright falsification of facts. I know that we are to abide by the laws of the land, but we cannot allow public opinion to silence our witness. You may be the only one willing to speak, but speak you must! [Acts 4:19-20 – But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. \[20\] For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.](#) Acts 5:29 – [Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.](#)

C. They Desired Credibility (30) – [By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.](#) The apostles prayed for the power of God to be revealed in their lives and ministry. They were not seeking vain glory, but credibility among those whom they witnessed. They wanted the power and presence of God to be so real that it would be evident that He, and He alone, was at work in their midst. They simply wanted to be a vessel through which God revealed Himself to the world.

- I see no arrogance in this prayer; in fact, I think we too should seek the Lord for credibility as we witness as well. There are so many today who seek to use Christianity as a tool for their personal gain. The name of Jesus generates a lot of revenue in our culture, but much of it is generated for self-indulgence. I pray that we will be used of God in such a way that His presence and power is revealed, and He alone gets the glory! We must decrease so He can increase in the hearts and minds of men.

I. The Difficulty of the Apostles (23-28)

II. The Desire of the Apostles (29-30)

III. The Delight of the Apostles (31) – [And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.](#) Here we discover the delight of the apostles through the response of God.

A. A Gracious Awareness – [And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together.](#) After their heartfelt, humble prayer for God's provision, He showed up mightily in their midst. The power of God literally shook the place where they were assembled. God had heard their prayer and revealed that He was with them, to empower and guide them.

- Wouldn't you like to experience something that wonderful? We could experience God's presence in such a way, but we must earnestly seek Him. He is no respecter of persons, but I fear that we are weak in our praying and in our desire to see a glorious move of God. We need a touch from the Lord if we are to prevail in the labor we are engaged in!

B. A Glorious Fullness – [and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost](#). God didn't just reveal His awesome power and presence to them; He filled them with the Holy Ghost. They received a fresh anointing of the Spirit. God enabled them to fulfill the task they had received and desired to accomplish.

- The believer is filled with the Spirit at the moment of conversion, but we need a continual filling as we journey through this life. There is little being accomplished today because few have the anointing of God on their lives. The heroes of the faith were just mortals like you and me. They were dependent upon the Lord just as we are. The difference was in their closeness to God and His enabling through the Spirit. We need an outpouring of God's Spirit in our lives!

C. A Genuine Boldness – [And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness](#). This is certainly not the end of the story. The apostles continued to preach the gospel with boldness. They had humbled themselves before the Lord, seeking His anointing and boldness, and God answered their request. He enabled them to overcome their fears and proclaim the message with full assurance.

- We could have that boldness as well, but we have to desire it. We must be willing to seek the Lord for boldness and use it once we've obtained it. I pray the Lord will begin in me and create a boldness in us that will turn this community upside down for the glory of God.

Many times we are hesitant to share the gospel because of doubt, fear, or uncertainty. We can avoid that hesitation through expectation of the power of God. Do you desire to be an effective witness for Christ? Do you want to make a difference in the lives of others? Do you need boldness to stand for the Lord? If so, why not come to Him. He can provide exactly what you need. If you are lost and have never trusted Christ in salvation, I urge you to seek Him today for that need in your life.

ⁱ Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times.