

## Acts 4 - BOLD

Before we begin this morning, I'd like you to do something for me. Just grab the pencil and paper that you were given on your way in, and I want you to write down two or three things that you prayed for this week. Nobody else is going to see this – you don't have to share this with the person sitting next to you, it's not coming to me to be marked. Just scribble down 2 or 3 things you prayed for last week.

We're in a series looking at the book of Acts – sometimes called the Acts of the Apostles, but maybe better as the Acts of the Holy Spirit – Acts which have continued for the last 2000 years and continue today.

I was having a bit of fun last night thinking about a one word title for each of the weeks of the Acts series we've had so far. I decided on the word "Witnesses" for the first week, because that's crucial not just to chapter 1 but in fact to the whole book. Acts centres around a statement from Jesus right at the beginning of the book in chapter 1:8 – let's just read this together so we can start to get it into our minds:

["...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."](#)

That's what this book is about, it's what the Acts of the Holy Spirit were about then, and it's what they're about today – to empower us to be witnesses for Jesus. That's what the plan is. That's what the power is for.

Chapter 2 was "Wonder". The Holy Spirit come down on the whole church for the first time at the festival of Pentecost – fire – wind – speaking in other languages – testimonies – witness statements about the man Jesus who everyone had heard about or even seen just two months before, an extraordinary day in Jerusalem when 3,000 people heard the testimony of the disciples, came to believe in Jesus and were baptised.

Then the single word for last week was "Name". We're not sure how long it was after Pentecost but probably a few weeks, maybe a month or two – Peter and John went to pray at the temple, met a lame man begging at the temple gate, and healed him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Power in that name. Authority in that name. And even more as we're going to see in a few minutes.

This week, the word is "Bold".

Somebody defined "Boldness" as "behaviour born out of belief". We're going to see several bold things today, but specifically we're going to look at boldness in the context of prayer. Bold prayers. So tying that definition into prayer, the idea I want to get across is that what you pray for reflects what you believe about God.

So if you don't pray at all, that reflects that you don't believe God can do anything, or that he doesn't exist at all.

If you pray very small prayers, then that suggests that you don't believe God can or will do anything bigger than that.

If your prayers are about you (bless me, help me, comfort me), that reflects a belief that God is there to serve you. And people who believe that and pray like that, when God doesn't then do what they asked him to do, they get offended and say "well, God must not be real."

People sometimes say: "Now all we can do is pray" – if prayer for you is a last resort, that reflects something about what you believe about God.

Exercise: go back to what you wrote down earlier. I want you to think about what you prayed for last week.

Some of you might say – "well, I didn't really pray". That says a lot about what you believe about God. Let's call it what it is.

Some of you might say "I can't really remember what I prayed for." That says a lot as well.

But for those of you that could remember some of the things you prayed for, take a look at your list, and then answer this question for yourself.

The question is this: if God said "yes" to everything you prayed for last week... If he miraculously answered and said yes to everything you asked for... what would be different in the world today? If you're like most people – and I'll include myself in this – if God said yes to all the things you prayed for, then the things that would be different would be things close to you. Things about your life, or your family, or your job, or your friends, or your... whatever.

If you really want to make a big difference in this life, you're going to need to learn to pray Bold prayers.

Bold prayers.

Let's catch up with the story from last week. Peter and John at the temple – lame man – healed him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

So this guy they healed started jumping and leaping and praising God, having been unable to walk for 40 years, and not surprisingly a crowd gathers around to see what's going on – "why's this guy leaping around – isn't that the guy who's been begging outside for 40 years – can't be – it is!"

More and more people come running in to where they're standing (or in the man's case, standing and walking and leaping and jumping, because he hasn't been able to do *any* of those for the last 40 years – but he's still clinging on to Peter and John – it's like he's afraid if he let's go of them he'll wake up from a dream and just be lying on the ground again!) Then Peter – notice that – Peter who was trained as a fisherman – Peter who had no theological training, no training in public speaking – Peter who was so cowardly 2 months

before this that wouldn't even acknowledge that he knew Jesus – Peter sees another opportunity to speak to this huge crowd, just as he had a few weeks before at Pentecost, and tells them all about Jesus.

And in fact his message is very similar to the talk he gave at Pentecost – if you were in Sales you would say that this is a *terrible* sales pitch... [“you killed...”]

So as we move into chapter 4 – and if you haven't already got your Bibles open, please do that now so that you can follow this with me – as we move into Acts 4, as Peter and John were talking to this big crowd at the temple, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees come up to them – this is the “'ello 'ello 'ello, what's going on 'ere then?” moment. These are the powers that be, and as they see what's going on they are really ticked off – and in particular the *Sadducees* are ticked off – because Peter and John are telling people that Jesus rose from the dead! Resurrection! Which is precisely what the Sadducees didn't believe in, even in general future terms, let alone specifically for a particular man they'd gone to great lengths to have put to death just a few months ago.

So they grab Peter and John and throw them in jail – but then look at verse 4. This is crazy if you think about the context. Peter's preached to the people, and just as he is giving the altar call and asking people to come forward to accept Jesus as Lord, he's hauled off to prison. You would think that would kind of put people off, wouldn't you? Say you believe in that Jesus guy and you get thrown into jail. But look at verse 4:

**But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.**

So let's see what happened next –

<sup>5</sup>The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup>They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'

<sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup>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, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,  
which has become the cornerstone.”

<sup>12</sup>Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.'

I want us to pause there for a minute, because this is just too important to miss. As I said, we were talking last week about the name of Jesus, and the fact that the crippled man had

been healed in the name of Jesus. It wasn't something clever that Peter and John had done; it was by the power and authority of Jesus' name that the man was healed. And that in itself is huge.

But Peter takes this a giant step further here. This isn't just about one man being healed. It's not even about everyone being healed. This is about salvation. This is about eternity. This is about life in all its fullness, starting now, and ending... never. This is about forgiveness. This is about hope. This is about freedom.

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

If you've never heard that before, you need to hear it now. Jesus Christ is it. His is the only name by which we must be saved. To many people this is deeply offensive – it's not meant to be offensive, it's just the truth.

Let's keep going – from verse 13...

<sup>13</sup> When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. <sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. <sup>16</sup> 'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> 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.'

<sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, 'Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

So the religious leaders are at a complete loss here. To be honest, the way they try to deal with this is so cynical it's almost comical. "Stop healing people! Stop doing things with God's power and authority! Because clearly you *have* God's power and authority or you wouldn't have been able to heal this man – but only *we* are supposed to represent God here. And we don't believe this resurrection stuff, so God mustn't tell people about it. I mean, *you* mustn't tell people about it!"

If that was comical, I bet their threats weren't comical. We don't know *how* Peter and John were threatened, but given what happened to *Jesus* just a few months before this, clearly they weren't talking about a £50 fine. We're talking about whipping, or beating, or imprisonment, or worse.

Peter and John don't seem to have been too affected by those threats. "As for us," they say, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

But what about the rest of the believers? What about that 5000 strong mega-church that's been growing like crazy over the last few weeks – they know all too well what powers the religious authorities have here. They've almost lost the two leading disciples – Peter and John are literally just out of prison, and only got away by the skin of their teeth. How's the new church going to react? Let's hear the last part of the story:

<sup>23</sup> On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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?  
<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one."

<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup> Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

<sup>31</sup> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Many of you will have heard me talk about this passage before, because I just think it's so exciting. The *very first* recorded prayer of the early church; a church that was growing daily; a church that grown to over 5000 people within weeks: surely there must be something important here for us to see here.

"Raised their voices *together in prayer to God.*" There's something exciting that happens when we pray together – you may have seen this in prayer meetings. On your own, your faith goes so far. When we meet together, it's like you climb on top of other people's faith. There is power when believers come together in agreement.

"Sovereign Lord" nothing out of your control... just want to remind you that we know who we're talking to.

Look how God-focussed this prayer is. You... you... your... you  
Starting their whole prayer with this massive "God-consciousness".

I can guarantee that God didn't need to hear that! This wasn't so that God could say "Oh yeah, thanks for reminding me!" But they were reminding themselves of who God is, and who they were talking to.

Then there's a quote from an OT prophecy that the Messiah would be mistreated and rejected.

Then bring this into their context – that is exactly what happened just 2 months before.

Then... here's the gimme gimme gimme of the prayer – what are they actually going to ask for?

Boldness. Boldness? Isn't that the problem we've got already? Wasn't it boldness that got Peter and John into this mess? Trouble – Jail – Riots – Antagonism with the authorities. Boldness? Aren't they already bold? Peter's developing a street preaching ministry which has already resulted in at least 5000 believers! Enough boldness!

But that's exactly what they pray for. "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."

Question: When did you last pray for boldness? Is that even in our vocabulary as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, to pray for boldness? We pray for people outside the faith – but do we pray for boldness to actually say something to them? Do we pray bold prayers about God revealing himself to them in miraculous ways?

Why do we know about Jesus? Because early church prayed for boldness – and most of the time we don't even think about it.

I found a great quote this week – not sure who it's from, but it's really good: "God isn't offended by your biggest dreams or boldest prayers. He is offended by anything less." That ties in with where we started about how our prayers reflect what we believe about God.

How many of you have been taught that we should only pray for what we can believe in? Don't pray beyond the level of your faith to believe that it will happen? That's true – that's good teaching – but we've taken it to the opposite extreme! We're missing out on all the powerful things God can do! If we're lacking in faith, we need to pray for more faith, not limit God to what we can comfortably believe in!

Then they pray for something even more extreme... "Stretch out your hand to heal, perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus". Ever pray for that?

What would it be like if we prayed for all the things we usually pray for – Father would you bless me and my family and give us a safe trip and help me pass my exams and get a job –

and then for boldness... to see opportunities to speak your word. To take opportunities.  
Do something through me.

What if you pray like that? You will see more opportunities – because God designed us to see what we're looking for.