

Hope Christian Church
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Series: *The Book of Acts: A Fresh Encounter*

12th Sermon in Series

We Cannot Stop Speaking [About Jesus]

Acts 4:13-22

In this first Sunday of 2009 we return to our series in Acts called *A Fresh Encounter*. We left Peter & John as they had been arrested by the captain of the temple along with the priests and the Sadducees. The occasion of their arrest had been the healing of a man who was born lame. After healing this man, in order to avoid any misunderstanding of how this miracle had happened and whose power had achieved it, Peter had preached a powerful sermon (3:12-26).

This sermon was interrupted by the arrival of the church police and since it was late in the day, Peter & John were kept in custody over night. The next morning Peter & John were brought before the Sanhedrin (i.e. Jewish high court) in order to be questioned.

The question was *“By what power or what name did you do this?”* (4:7). Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, then answers with a very clear pronouncement that the power to heal this man had come from Jesus of Nazareth (4:10).

This is the same Jesus whom this very council had only about two months ago crucified and whom God had raised from the dead proving that “salvation is found in no other name under heaven” (4:12). This incredible claim shocked the council and it still shocks hearers today. “No other name under heaven” includes all names on earth and means that ***apart from conscious knowledge of and faith in Jesus there is no salvation.***

This is what Jesus Himself taught. In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me.”* The apostle Paul also taught this in a passage that has become the heartbeat of missionaries around the world.

In Romans 10:13 Paul wrote (quoting Joel 2:32), *“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”* He then went on (in verse 14) to expound the implications of this verse by writing, *“But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 17 So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*

Salvation comes when a person “calls upon the name of the Lord.” Since no one calls out for salvation to someone they don’t believe in, physically (i.e. consciously) hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ is necessarily required for anyone to believe in Jesus and be saved. And God has decided to save only those who put their faith the name of Jesus, His only Son.

If there is no speaking about Jesus, there is no salvation of human souls. Therefore, **we cannot stop speaking about Jesus.** We must seize every opportunity that we are given to speak about Jesus. We must look for opportunities and we must create opportunities.

And opportunities will come. They will come in the form of questions from curious people and they will come in the form of condemnation from critical clerics. Peter and John found themselves before the Supreme Court of their day. In the moment of questioning, God supplied Peter and John with the comfort, support, wisdom, and boldness they needed. He sent His Holy Spirit (4:8) to fill Peter and Peter answered them well.

As we turn to the text for this morning, note three observations about Peter and John and two observations about the unbelieving heart. My prayer is that all five of these observations will serve to strengthen you so that you **cannot stop speaking about Jesus.**

Three Observations About Peter & John

- 1) Peter & John Possessed Uncommon Boldness
- 2) Being Uncommonly Used by God Does Not Depend Upon Education
- 3) Peter & John Were Empowered for Uncommon Obedience

Two Observations About the Unbelieving Heart

- 1) Undeniable Evidence Does Not Necessarily Lead to Faith
- 2) Is Content Never to Hear the Name of Jesus

Three Observations About Peter & John

1) Peter & John Possessed Uncommon Boldness (v.13)

4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Where did Peter and John get this boldness? The Sadducees and the priests and all the Jewish religious elite who were present were “astonished.” The word in Greek *ethaumazon*, literally means “began to wonder and kept it up.”¹ They were astonished at these two men and they kept on being astonished at them.

Where did these men get this boldness? They received it from the Holy Spirit. This will be a theme throughout the book of Acts. The coming of the Holy Spirit brought first and foremost bold proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us the job description of the Holy Spirit in John 15 and 16. At the center of all that the Holy Spirit does is the glorification of Jesus. Jesus, speaking about the Holy Spirit, said in John 16:14, “*He will glorify Me.*” The ultimate goal in all that the Holy Spirit does in our lives (i.e. comforting, teaching, bringing to remembrance, etc.) is to glorify Jesus. The Holy Spirit enables us to glorify Jesus.

¹ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 3: Acts, Quickverse ver. 2.

One of the ways He does this is through bold proclamation of the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to enable bold witness to the gospel.

John 15:26 *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”*

We need the Holy Spirit to give us the boldness and ability to speak truthfully about Jesus. This is why Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit came (Luke 24:48-49).

Remember Acts 1:8 *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* The Holy Spirit came to give power to the disciples to be bold witnesses.

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and filled Peter and he preached and 3,000 were saved. The Holy Spirit filled Peter again (4:8) and empowered him to boldly proclaim and glorify Jesus in front of the Jewish Supreme Court and they were all astonished.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit TODAY to fill us so we too can boldly proclaim and glorify Jesus.

They Recognized They Had Been With Jesus

Notice the conclusion the council draws as a result of Peter’s and John’s witness and answer to their question. Their conclusion was *not*, “Wow! These two are impressive speakers.” Look at it at the end of verse 13, “...and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” When the Holy Spirit blesses His servants, the result will always be to point people to Jesus.

Will anyone recognize that you have been with Jesus?

The first observation is that Peter and John possessed an uncommon boldness in speaking about Jesus and that boldness came from the Holy Spirit and pointed the hearers to Jesus of Nazareth. May we too be granted such grace that God would chose to glorify the name of Jesus through us.

2) Being Uncommonly Used by God Does Not Depend Upon Education (v.13)

4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

These religious leaders were astonished at Peter and John because they “uneducated and common men.” This means they knew that Peter and John had not attended the rabbinic schools and participated in formal rabbinic education. In this sense they were “uneducated.” They had not been a part of the religious aristocracy so these scholars were surprised that Peter and John were able to argue with such conviction and clarity.

Peter and John were certainly educated but their Teacher had been the Author Himself who had taught them about the kingdom of God for forty days (Acts 1:3) and “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

This is the way God works. He takes the most unlikely of persons and uses them in uncommon ways so that we will glorify Him rather than the instrument He uses.

1 Cor 1:26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Peter and John were not scholars. They were common men. They were not formally educated yet they certainly could boldly testify to the gospel before the rulers of the land. God chose to use two simple fishermen to preach the gospel before the Supreme Court of their day.

We should not let “lack of education” or some lack of formal training ever keep us from testifying about Jesus. You don’t have to have a degree to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. You simply have to have faith in Jesus that He will through His Spirit give you the words to say.

God can use anyone who is willing to be a witness for Jesus. You might think, “I can’t speak for Jesus. I don’t know enough.” Well, Peter and John are good examples for us. For evidently the Holy Spirit can fill uneducated men and equip common fishermen to proclaim His name.

Jesus once praised God for hiding these things from the wise and revealing them to little children (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21). Peter and John were uncommonly used by God and it did not depend upon their education. We can’t let a lack of education stop us from speaking about Jesus.

3) Peter & John Exhibited Uncommon Obedience (v.19-20)

4:19-20 But Peter and John answered them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

The third observation is that Peter and John Exhibited uncommon obedience. The council heard the testimony of Peter and John, discussed it for a bit, and then rendered their decision; no more talking or teaching in the name of Jesus (4:18).

The Supreme Court of the land had issued its verdict. The question for Peter and John was would they obey it? The decision of the court was in direct opposition to the command of Jesus. Jesus had commanded His disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations starting in Jerusalem.

Luke 24:47 “... *repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*” (See also Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

Now they were being commanded to keep quiet? Would they obey?

If the Supreme Court of the United States were to decide that it was unlawful for anyone to “speak or teach in the name of Jesus” would you obey? This may become law some day in this country.

Peter is very clear. He says, "You decide. Should we obey God or you?" The answer is obvious.

It is as if he is saying, "Look, brothers, we're just talking about what we've seen and heard. We're just telling people about our experiences. Is that against God's law? We've witnessed God at work? Is it unlawful to speak about what God has done in our lives?"

Peter tells them that they will *not* obey. All the council can do is threaten them further (v.21a).

The Same Court That Killed Jesus

Remember that Peter is facing the same high priest and the same council that condemned Jesus to death not two months prior. He knows that defying this court could mean his death, yet his answer in verse 20 is clear. "*We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*"

Another way to translate this verse is "we are not able not to speak about what we have seen and heard."

John Wycliffe Translation (1382)

4:20 *For we must needs speak those things, that we have seen and heard. [Forsooth we may not not speak the things that we have seen and heard.]*

Holman Christian Standard Bible

4:20 *for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

New Century Version

4:20 *We cannot keep quiet. We must speak about what we have seen and heard."*

Knowing that their lives could be on the line, Peter and John are unflinching in their obedience to God. Their obedience is uncommon. Let one of our prayers for 2009 be that *that* level and degree of obedience to God would not be uncommon at all. Peter and John would not stop speaking about Jesus even if their lives depended upon it.

Who will you obey, God or men?

Two Observations About the Unbelieving Heart

We've seen three observations about Peter and John, now let's turn to two observations about the unbelieving heart. The first observation is seen in verse 14.

1) Undeniable Evidence Does Not Necessarily Lead to Faith (v.14-16)

4:14-16 *But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.*

Not only was Peter and John standing before them, so was the formerly lame man. Verse 22 tells us that the man who was healed was more than 40 years old. This is the man who was “born lame and daily laid beside the temple gate” (Acts 3:2). Every one of these religious leaders had walked past this man probably hundreds of times and seen him lying at the gate begging. Now he was **standing** in front of them. Yet did this miracle lead them to put their trust in Jesus? No, amazingly it did not.

Why were these “shepherds of Israel” *not* rejoicing with this man? Why were they *not* excited and praising God (with all the rest of Jerusalem – 4:21) for showing such grace?

Can you imagine not being moved at least a little by seeing a man healed who had been lame for more than forty years (i.e. from birth)? Would not even the most cynical Sadducee be tempted to shout for joy??? The unbelieving heart is a hard heart.

Here this healed man is standing before them! They are looking him in the eye and still they are seeking for some way to oppose Peter and John. They are not looking at what God has done. They are looking at what they might possibly lose – their position of power. If Messiah had truly come then they would be out of a job.

Despite the fact that undeniable evidence is literally standing before them, they are still seeking to oppose God. They would deny the miracle if they could but the problem was that “all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” knew that this was a miracle and were praising God. They wanted to deny it but could not.

Undeniable Evidence Does Not Lead To Faith

Undeniable evidence does not necessarily lead to faith in Jesus. This court is faced with the fact that 40+-year-old man has been healed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth right in front of their eyes and yet the unbelieving heart is *not* moved to faith.

So do not be discouraged when your witness to the gospel of Jesus does not persuade people. There will be times (many times) when your witness will not be persuasive. Love of sin results in unbelievable hard heartedness. This does not mean that we should not strive to be persuasive witnesses.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:11 “*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.*” And Luke records that Paul “*reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade the Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 18:4).

The unbelieving heart is not opened to faith in Jesus *by* persuasive argumentation alone. But it is often *through* persuasive argumentation that the Holy Spirit opens the unbelieving heart and grants faith to the hearer.

I Corinthians 2:13 *And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit.*

We can and should (indeed we are commanded to) impart the words of the gospel to human hearts, but the teaching of the Holy Spirit is required to open the eyes of our hearts.² We are called to be faithful witnesses. We are not called to win arguments. It is up to us to open our mouths and glorify the name

² Romans 2:29 *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*

of Jesus. It is up to God to open hearts to put faith and trust in Jesus of Nazareth.³ And if we will not stop speaking about Jesus, He will open many hearts.

2) The Unbelieving Heart Is Content Never to Hear the Name of Jesus (v.17-18)

4:17-18 *But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name. 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

What does the “it” in verse 17 refer to? They certainly are not afraid that the man’s healing will spread. Their main concern has to do with the “name” of Jesus. This is what they do not want to spread. They do not want the name of Jesus to be glorified.

So they decide to “warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” They do not want to hear the name of Jesus. They want all teaching and even *speaking* of His name silenced. They not only want Peter and John to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus’ name. They don’t even want them “to speak at all in the name of Jesus.”

Is today any different? In most situations it is acceptable to speak about “God.” We hear every presidential candidate routinely pronounce “God bless America!” Even on some popular TV shows it is OK to talk about God. But consider for a moment how tense the room will become if the name “Jesus” is mentioned.

Rick Warren will give the Inaugural Invocation. I wonder if he will name the name of Jesus?

Have any of you when given guidelines on delivering public addresses heard the line, “It’s OK to pray, just don’t pray in Jesus’ name. It’s too divisive.”

This is the first resistance to the gospel we’ve seen thus far in the book of Acts. Up to this point, there has been acceptance to the message of salvation through Jesus. The opposition will now increase in intensity and severity.

The unbelieving heart is content never to hear the name of Jesus. Ever since the first century the world has been trying to silence the name of Jesus. *But that is the very name that must be proclaimed if sinful souls are to be saved.*

We Talk About What We Love

Why don’t Christians talk about Jesus more? Why are we Christians so easily silenced? You know it is easy to talk about things we love and enjoy.

Two weeks ago I was doing some Christmas shopping. I stopped in a computer store in the mall. The store was packed. An elderly gentle man was waiting for some assistance from one of the store clerks. I wondered if I might answer his question so I asked him if I might help him. We talked about computers for about 10 minutes and I answered a several of his questions.

³ See Acts 16:14.

As I walked out of the store it occurred to me that I did not tell the man about Jesus. It was easy to talk about the computer because I enjoy computers, but why didn't I mention the person who brings me the most joy.

We all talk about what we love most. We can easily strike up a conversation with anyone about our favorite sports team, or our favorite auto manufacturer, or best place to shop, our kids or grandkids, our favorite computer, or whatever we value most. We are all evangelists for something, whether its sound investing or getting the best education. We all talk about what we love most.

So if we don't talk about Jesus very much do we really love Him?

The reason the world does not want to hear about Jesus is because they do not love Him.

John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

Peter and John plainly told the court that they would not obey the order. They would not stop talking about Jesus. Jesus had said, "*If you love me you will obey me*" (John 14:15, 23-24). Jesus had commanded the disciples to "preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). Peter and John loved Jesus enough that they would not stop speaking His name.

This is the question for us. Do we love Him so much that we cannot stop speaking and teaching in His name and telling the world about Him?

What should we do if we don't love Him that much?

Friday night just after midnight my son came in to me and stood beside my bed clearly upset about something. I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "Daddy, I know I should love Jesus more than you and mommy but, I don't. It's so hard when I can't see Him and can't play with Him. What should I do?"

I said, "Pray and ask Him to give you a heart to love Him more than anything else in the world."

Father, pour out Your Spirit upon those of us who hear so that we can boldly tell the world about Your Son. Jesus send the Spirit of truth, fill us again so that we will have power to be Your witnesses to a world that needs to know that there is salvation in no other name but Yours alone.