

# Acts 4:1-31

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[0:00] And if you've got a Bible, please turn to Acts chapter 4. If you'd like a Bible, they're just at the doors. You come in, it'll really help you if you've got one in front of you. We're going to take a little break from Acts.

I'm preaching away in some different IPC churches over the next few weeks. And it's not long until Advent. And we should give a very warm welcome to those who are in the old chapel.

And so, are you all right? Thumbs up. I wrote to the church this week saying that we were so full that we were going to free up lots of room in here by moving two of the house groups each week into the old chapel.

So we're very grateful that you've taken that sacrifice to be the first. And there's not massive amounts of room are there today. So that's really encouraging. It's encouraging because the church is growing.

And that is the message of the book of Acts. That the church of Jesus Christ is growing. And the word of God is unstoppable.

[1:01] In fact, the big issue in the book of Acts is the progress of the word of God. The risen Lord Jesus Christ commissions his apostles to be witnesses that will go out to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit is poured out from heaven. The church grows. And Jesus continues to work from heaven. And the way that the book of Acts speaks about it is quite interesting.

It talks about that the word of God grows. It's a strange phrase, isn't it? The word of God grows. The word of God multiplies. The word of God increases.

Let me just show you this. And so, keep a finger in chapter 4. Turn over to chapter 6, verse 7. Just a couple of pages. Chapter 6, verse 7. And they make decisions there for the good of the church and for the growth of the church.

And then it says this. Chapter 6, verse 7. The word of God increased. What does that mean? It means that the number of disciples multiplied greatly. And miracles of miracles.

[2:09] And number of the priests, the religious elite, they were obedient to the faith. That is a miracle. Turn over to chapter 12. Just a few pages on.

In verse 24, there's this wonderful passage. Before this King Herod comes to a very sticky end. And then in chapter 12, verse 24, we read that the word of God grew and multiplied.

Same thing. Just go one passage on. Chapter 13, verse 48. And it says, When the Gentiles, the non-Jews, heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

And as many were appointed to eternal life believed. And chapter 13, verse 49. The word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. Just one more. Chapter 19.

The next chapter. And verse 20. Many people are soundly brought to Christ. And chapter 19, verse 20. The word of God grew and prevailed mightily.

[3:12] Let's go back to chapter 4. The big issue is the spread of the word of God. No sooner does the word of God appear.

No sooner is the good news of the Lord Jesus preached. No sooner do men and women and boys and girls are saved through repentance and faith. No sooner does that happen than there is vicious and consistent hostility and persecution.

It breaks out. We're going to see the three ways to destroy the church in these chapters. But starting right here in Acts chapter 4. Right up to this very day.

The devil's most obvious and brutal strategy is. The use of violence and intimidation. Coercion and pressure. Against Christians.

And the devil's mission remains the same. It hasn't changed. He will do whatever he can to silence the ministry of the word of God. He wants to stop the spread of the word.

[ 4 : 21 ] He wants to stop the spread of salvation. And so he continues to work ceaselessly to stop the spread of the word of God. Everything up to this point in Acts has been just lovely.

Jesus has gone to heaven hasn't he? He's given his disciples this brilliant purpose of bringing, of being a blessing to the ends of the earth.

And they're to take his name to the ends of the earth. And he's poured out his Holy Spirit upon them so that they would do it. And he's created a community that's marked by radical generosity and love and generous hospitality.

And true community. And the apostles go out and they speak about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And people believe it's the most brilliant thing that's ever happened. People start coming to faith in him. In chapter 3 there's a lame man who's been lame from birth for 40 years.

[ 5 : 26 ] And with the authority of Jesus Christ he is healed. And you come to the end of chapter 3 and this guy who was lame for 40 years is standing there. And Peter and John are preaching about the Lord Jesus and all the blessings of God.

And then it's interrupted by chapter 4 verse 1 to 4. Look what it says. As they were speaking to the people, the priest, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them.

Greatly, greatly overjoyed at what was happening. Greatly thrilled that this man had been kind of restored to life. No, greatly annoyed. Greatly annoyed.

Because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they arrested them. Put them in custody till the next day.

For it was already evening. But, and it's a very big but isn't it? But many of those who heard the word believed. And the number of men came to about 5,000.

[ 6 : 33 ] And if you look at verse 12. It says there, doesn't it? And that salvation is found in no other name given among men. And the word in verse 12 is for men and women there. But the word in verse 4 is actually just the word for men.

So let's say they had 2.5 children. A husband and a wife, 2.5 kids. You can multiply it, isn't it? Look at verse 4. There's about 20, 20, 22 and a half thousand people.

And the fact that we're told that it was the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees that have got an issue tells us that this is a problem of power and authority.

And so it's no accident that they came upon the apostles. It's not as if they were wandering around and suddenly they found these people preaching. No, this is carefully devised.

They've met their legal team. They're going to use as much legal force as they can do to get away with it. They hide their use of the law. But really what they want to do is silence people.

[ 7 : 42 ] They want to stop the spread of the name of Jesus. They want to extinguish the fire of the Spirit before this movement of the Spirit gets out of hand.

And of course it's an abuse of the office of priest, isn't it? It infuriated these religious people that Peter and John, untrained people, were preaching the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

And the thing about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that Jesus has risen from the dead, is this.

It's that you can't control it. I don't know if you've noticed about Christianity, but when you talk about and believe in the resurrection, it automatically puts you into a power struggle.

Either Jesus really is Lord, or you're going to deny that and hold on to the fact that you are Lord.

The resurrection is all about power and control.

Power and control in my life, and power and control in religious institutions, like you see here. And it was even worse for this group of people called the Sadducees, because the Sadducees did not believe in any kind of resurrection.

[ 9 : 02 ] So the preaching of Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and he reigns, and he is Lord, and he's calling people from all over the world to him. It infuriated these religious people.

It enraged them. If you were going to try and market the gospel to the Sadducees in Jerusalem, it is a very stupid thing to talk about the resurrection.

Surely, Peter and John, with these religious people, you'd want to play down that element, wouldn't you? Peter and John, they need, don't they, some media training, savvy media training.

They don't get it. So they preach this message that Jesus is Lord, they're thrown into prison. This is less than two months since this same group of authorities have managed to have Jesus executed.

And I guess they think to themselves that crushing this movement won't take much trouble. They put these two guys in prison overnight. And I tell you this, this is written for our encouragement.

[10:16] If you are going to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you're going to walk in step with his Holy Spirit, and you're going to seek to spread the word, you will have a negative reaction.

It doesn't matter how gracious you will be, how sensitive to your audience, how intelligent, how loving you are, you will have a negative reaction.

The lovely thing in this passage is that this tactic that Satan uses of persecution and coercion and intimidation and pressure backfires, doesn't it?

And so there are the apostles stewing away in prison. And lo and behold, they become bold. The very people that this is supposed to intimidate, it makes them bolder.

And the word spreads and the word grows. You find this throughout the Bible. The authorities, both religious and secular, lock up Christians, and the Christians keep talking about the gospel.

[11:28] And the word spreads. So here in chapter 4 of Acts, you've got conflict. And the conflict is basically between human authority and the authority of God.

I've divided the chapter into two. You've got the long court scene from verses 5 to 12. And I've called that the failure of human power. And so what you have here is the priests and the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin council.

Motivated by their own power and by their own position. And then you have Peter and John motivated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as I said to you earlier, these two things will always come into conflict.

As we go through this, it is good to examine ourselves. What are we motivated? Am I motivated by power or position or public opinion?

Because if I'm motivated by those things, it will always put me into conflict with the risen Jesus. And as it begins in verses 5, 6, and 7, it sends a shiver down our spine.

[12:39] Peter and John are brought up, aren't they, by the very men who executed Jesus. The temple is controlled by one family.

The temple mafia. It was headed up by the godfather who is Annas, the high priest. He's the high priest between 6 and 50 AD. Five of his sons become high priests.

One son-in-law and one grandson. Every high priest until the fall of Jerusalem in AD 66 was part of this family. They're the mob. And they draw Peter and John out before them.

And in verse 7, they say, here's the key. Can you see it? Verse 7. By what power? By what name did you do this? The issue, do you remember, is power and authority.

They see this, don't they, as a matter of jurisdiction. What the apostles are doing and what they're preaching, it threatens their structures. And their concern is not whether the miracle actually happened.

[13:43] They don't deny that. Their concern is not whether the resurrection of the Lord Jesus actually took place. Their concern is not with the truth at all. Their concern is, have you got your coaching badges?

By what authority do you do this? On what authority, by what power do you act and speak? Who gave you the right to speak like you do? How dare you go outside of our jurisdiction?

Here is Peter, who two months before, in the very same place, denied Jesus Christ. Do you remember? He was afraid of being exposed by a teenage girl.

Do you remember? And he denies the Lord Jesus. And now he stands in front of the most powerful assembly in all of Israel. And what does he do? We don't know whether his knees were knocking. But we do know, don't we, he is respectful and he's forthright and he's truthful. Even though he's being treated as a common criminal. And he takes the opportunity to speak the word of God.

[14:47] And I hope you notice, it only takes him one sentence to get to Jesus. He says to them, if you're interested in how this miracle took place, the answer is Jesus.

And then when he gets to Jesus, he preaches the gospel. Look at verse 10 with me. Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this man, the sky is standing before you well.

This Jesus, he's a stone that was rejected by you. The builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there's salvation in no one else, no other name under heaven, given to man by which we must be saved.

It's a one point sermon with two applications. Which is very helpful for us preachers. The one point of the sermon is really the point of nearly all the sermons in Acts.

Your view of Jesus and the way that you've treated Jesus is diametrically opposed to the way that God has. You crucified him, that's what you thought of him, but God has raised him.

[16:04] And the resurrection not only shows that Jesus is alive and is able to do miracles, but the resurrection shows you that Jesus is God's anointed Messiah.

He's the king. That's the point of the resurrection. He is Lord. Now again, I don't think that's a very helpful way to defend yourself against the Sanhedrin who didn't even believe in the resurrection. Jesus is not apologizing. Peter is not apologizing for Jesus' resurrection. He's in trouble for preaching it, and then he preaches it again.

And the reason he does that is because even though he knows that the council hate the gospel, they are not going to come to believe the gospel until God opens their eyes and opens their ears to it.

And the way that God does that is through the preaching of the gospel. That as people hear the news of this king Jesus, their eyes and ears are opened.

[17:15] So he makes two applications. The first is in verse 11. He says, you are the builders of the religion in Israel. But if you leave Jesus Christ out of it, everything that you are building is going to crumble.

He says to them, you might build a very fine edifice of religion with all sorts of things in it, but unless Jesus Christ is at the center and the heart and the key, God will not be a part of it, and you will not be transformed by it.

Without the Lord Jesus, everything you're building will crumble. The second application is in verse 12. There is no other name under heaven given by God through whom we must be saved.

That's remarkable, isn't it? He's saying if you reject the risen Jesus, you reject the only salvation that God offers you. The very name that you wish to extinguish is your only hope.

And all your ceremonies and all your prayers, apart from Jesus, are worthless. Don't you find that helpful in our kind of pluralist post-modern culture?

[18:29] That the Apostle Peter should put it this way. That if Peter is right, if there is salvation in no other name than Jesus, it means that at the very least, there is no salvation in Muhammad.

And there's no salvation in Buddha. And there's no salvation in Krishna. And there's no salvation in yourself. Because only Jesus has come from God.

And only Jesus has died for our sins. And only Jesus has been raised from the dead. And only Jesus will come again in glory. And it is only through Jesus that God offers forgiveness.

Forgiveness of our sins and the gift of his spirit. And not just the healing of our bodies one day in glory. But the healing of the deeper and dreadful disease that all of us suffer with.

That is our sin and our rebellion and our guilt. It's very bold, isn't it? And the council, when they hear that, is not a little astonished.

[19:30] Verse 13. They take note of their boldness. Even though these men are amateurs.

They're not theologically trained. They're laymen. But they speak with courage. And they keep on insisting on the resurrection.

And it provides a terrible problem for the council. Just a little sideline here. Nowhere in the book of Acts Did the enemies of the gospel Try and disprove the resurrection?

Nowhere in the early years After Jesus was raised from the dead Do people say, well no, no, it didn't happen. If there possibly would have been a way That they could have done that Surely they would have done that, wouldn't they?

Nowhere do you see The opponents of the gospel Ever trying to disprove the resurrection. In this part They send Peter out of the room Out of the council and talk together And they decide this isn't the best damage The best bet is damage control Verse 18 They bring them back in And they place a gagging order On Peter and John They say We do not want you to mention Jesus Christ again When you see this phrase The name of Jesus It's not like a lucky charm It's not if you say In the name of Jesus Something magical will happen The name of Jesus Is the person of Jesus It is the specific understanding Of who Jesus is That he is the one who was crucified Died Buried Raised in glory Come again And by him God is building By him God alone saves

And the Sanhedrin And the Sanhedrin Want John To promise To keep silent Because they say We have the authority And then we read In verse 19 It's brilliant isn't it Peter and John Answered them Well whether it's right In the sight of God To listen to you Rather than to God Well you must judge that For we cannot But speak Of what we've seen And heard Peter and John They're respectful

They're polite And then they state Flatly We will disobey And they have no idea What it's going to cost Them long term But their obedience To the Lord Jesus Outweighs their obedience To this council Or any other factor And so I want to Point out to you This morning Really clearly That if as Christians We want to be Obedient To God It will mean

[ 22 : 21 ] That you must Be disobedient To the duly Appointed lawful Authorities Of the church And of the state And so if the state If the government Call upon you And me To do something That is contrary Against The will of God It is your Christian duty To disobey And that may prove Isn't it Very very costly But be under No doubt That when the Authorities And God Collide For the Christian We must say Jesus Christ Is Lord That's what this Passage is about The conflict Between human Authority And the authority Of God When your employer Says you Must do this But it is against The word of God The Christian Will say no Jesus is Lord The reason for that

Of course Is this Underneath all Our commitments Is the great Commitment to Jesus Christ Not all of our Commitments are Equal We seek to live I hope as good Citizens of London And England We enjoy Don't we The benefits Of generations That have gone Before It's part of What Remembrance Sunday is about But the reason That we do That is because Of a prior And deeper Commitment to Please Jesus Christ That's human Power Let's move Secondly and Briefly To the success Of human Weakness Verses 23 To 31 As soon as They're released Peter and John They race back To the church Community The fellowship And the first Thing they do Is pray And there are Two features Of the prayer That are important For us First of all They find refuge In the complete Sovereignty Of God They don't go to God and say Lord everything Is out of control It's all gone wrong

They don't say God you've let us Down This hasn't Turned out As we'd hoped They don't go to God and say The good guys Have been arrested No they pray Don't they Sovereign Lord And the first Two thirds Of the prayer Are them telling Each other And God Of his Matchless control They say Lord you created All things Heaven and earth The mountains The stars The sea And you revealed Through the mouth Of your David That people Who you've created Will rage Against you And against your Son Jesus Christ And that's Been fulfilled In our experience And so it's Really important For you and I Brothers and sisters This morning That when wicked Things happen The sovereignty Of God Hasn't been Turned aside The sovereignty Of God He doesn't Turn his back And allow things To happen While he's not Looking Nor is it

So much That God's Sovereignty Works around Wickedness But what the Apostles are Saying here Is really Important It's saying That the Very wickedness Of men And women Promotes And prospers The purposes Of God And they Remember Don't they Verse 27 And 28 The crucifixion Of Jesus As an act Of desperate Wickedness Where the Sinless Son of God Is put To death By a Plot And they Know that Even through That God is Working his Salvation So what's The worst Day that This world Has ever Known What's the Worst day That this World has Ever Known It's The day When Jesus Christ Was crucified Isn't it It's the Day when They killed The author Of life When they Put the Son of God In his Humanity To death It's the Worst sin That's ever Been committed But what's The best Day in The history Of the World What's The best Day in The history Of the World It is The day

When Jesus Christ The Lamb Of God Was crucified And that is The shape Of every Event ever Since I don't Know what Your circumstances Are this Morning I don't Know what You're Facing But the Arm of God is Not Shorter Today Than it Was On the Day of Crucifixion And God In his Sovereignty Today Is no Less Than it Was at Peter and John's Trial And he Is working All things For the Glory of His Son And you If you've Trusted in His Son Can rest In that And that's Why they Pray about His sovereignty And that's Why they Pray to His sovereignty And the Second feature Of the Prayer is What do They pray For Verses 29 and 30 It's Really Interesting Isn't It What do They pray For They don't Pray for Deliverance And they Don't Pray for Protection And they Don't Pray for Safety And they

[ 27 : 31 ] Don't Pray Lord give Us a Quiet life And look After us They Pray for Boldness The Very Thing that Got them Into Trouble in The First Place Was Their Boldness It's Wonderful Here They Are They See That The Real Issue Is Not Their Comfort And Their Long Term Security And Their Life Goals The Real Issue For These Men Was The Glory Of Jesus Christ And The Primary Way That Jesus Is Glorified Is Through The Spread Of The Gospel And If They Hadn't Been Bold They Would Not Have Been Arrested And Now They Pray for More Boldness It's Unnatural Don't You Think They Don't Just Pray That They Be Faithful The Aim Of These Early Christians Was That

They Would Be Obedient And

Jesus Christ Had Called Them To Be Witnesses They Don't Just Pray That They Would Stand Still As A Church That They Would Be Kept They Pray That They Would Move Forward With The Word Of God And God's Will For Us As A Church Family Is Not Just That We Would Be Kept It Is Not Just That We Would Be Faithful It Is Not Just That We Would Stand But We Would Move Forward With The Word Of God God Because You And You And I Are Caught Up In The Same Conflict Today And Satan's Desire Is Exactly The Same Is Silence The Gospel Our Culture Takes Great Pride In Kind Of Having Outgrown All Forms Of Religious Intolerance At At At That's What It Thinks And Yet Religious Intolerance Shows Itself Doesn't It In Different Ways The Media Take Every Opportunity They Can To Persecute The Message

Of Jesus Subtly And Often In Entertaining ways And We Might Not Be Imprisoned We're Very Unlikely To Be Imprisoned But We Do Run The To To Silence The Gospel And So As I Finish Two Things Alright I Want to Leave You With Two Things Alright First Of All This Do Not Fear But Rest On God's Sovereign Power Do Not Fear But Rest On God's Sovereign Power And Grace And So Maybe Today You Feel Very Anxious And Tearful Maybe It Feels Like It's A Little Bit Out Of Control And When There's Conflict And When There's Opposition And You Don't Know The Way Ahead It's Natural Isn't It To Feel Fearful Later On In This Book Of Acts The Apostle Paul Says To Some New Christians He Says It's Through Many Trials That We Must Enter The Kingdom Of God But It Is The Kingdom Of God And It Is Under The Rule Of King Jesus Who Is Risen From The Dead And He Is Lord And He Still Reigns And He Is Sovereignly Committed To His Purposes And I Want To Say This Morning God Will Provide And He Will Care For Us And Therefore Each Of Us In Our Different Circumstances Must Rest On His Sovereign Power And On His Sovereign Grace Do Not Fear And Then Secondly!

Do Not Be Silenced But Pray For Boldness Because Opposition And Hardship Can Either Make You More Timid Can't It Or More Bold And I Don't Know What Boldness Looks Like For You In Your Circumstances It Will Be Different For What It Looks Like For Me But Can I Encourage You In Your Prayers And In Your Family And In Your Circle Of Influence That You Would Be Bold Because If Jesus Christ Has Died And Is Risen And If God Is Sovereign We Have The Freedom To Speak And To Be Bold Do Not Fear Be

[ 32 : 36 ] Bold Let Me Finish With These Words Of Jesus Blessed Are You When Men Revile You And Persecute You And Out All Kinds Of Evil Against You Falsely On My Account Rejoice And Be Glad For Great Is Your Reward In Heaven For So Men Persecuted The Prophets Who Were Before You Let's Pray