

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ 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?*

*²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the Lord
and against his Anointed One.’*

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

³¹ 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. (Acts 4:23-31)

Speak the Word of God Boldly!

My first real ministry experience came the summer after my first year at the seminary. I spent that summer working at a mission in New York City. The very first week I got there, the pastor sent me to make a “cold call” on a prospect. I was supposed to just show up at her door and talk to her about Jesus. Do you know what I was thinking as I walked to her apartment? “I hope she’s not home! I hope she’s not home!” How would you feel in the same situation? Even if we leave out the “cold call” aspect of it, how do you feel when God gives you opportunities to talk about Jesus? Excited or intimidated? In the Word of God that we have before us today, the congregation in Jerusalem responded to persecution by preaching the Word of God boldly. Would you use that word “boldly” when it comes to your talking about Jesus with your friends and co-workers? How about with your own spouse or children or parents? Could it be that we are afraid to talk about our Savior even with each other? And if that’s true, what chance is there that we’ll ever talk about Jesus to people who still don’t know or believe the gospel? Today, God calls us to have a different attitude. Follow the example of the first New Testament congregation! **Speak the Word of God boldly!**

I.

Of course, that’s not always an easy thing to do. Even in my own home, I don’t always do a good job of talking about Jesus. How can we overcome that problem? We see the answer in the experience of that congregation in Jerusalem. **Speak the Word of God boldly by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

In the verses before our text, Peter and John did a miracle. They healed a crippled man right at the entrance to the temple in Jerusalem. Immediately a crowd gathered and Peter told them that this man was healed by the power of Jesus. Within minutes, the religious authorities arrested them and the next day, Peter and John boldly told the Jewish ruling council that Jesus, whom they crucified, had done this miracle. Well, the Jewish leaders couldn’t deny the miracle, so they ordered them to stop preaching about Jesus and let them go.

When they got back, the church in Jerusalem asked God to give them power to proclaim the gospel. Then Luke, the author of the book of Acts, says, **“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.”** Don’t you think that these people had a reason to be afraid? The religious leadership was also the local political leadership. Just a few months before this, they had murdered Jesus and made it look like it was a legal proceeding. If they had killed Jesus, what was going to stop them from killing regular guys? Yet, these Christians were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God boldly.

You cannot speak the Word of God boldly – indeed, you can't really speak the Word of God at all – without the power of the Holy Spirit. Why are we afraid to speak? We're believers. We're supposed to trust in God and do his work. Why don't we? Are we worried about looking foolish? Are we worried about losing the respect of people whose opinions matter to us? Are we afraid of being ridiculed or worse? All those things are probably true to some extent. But there is a more basic problem.

We're sinners. It's much more than just being afraid to speak publicly. It's much more than knowing what the consequences could be. Our real problem is that deep inside of every one of us there is a sinner who just doesn't want to talk about Jesus. Even after we come to faith, that sinner is still inside us. He hides in our fear and anxiety but also in our pride and in the desire to have other people think highly of us and in the unwillingness to risk that by talking about Jesus. Even we believers have a part of us that never wants to talk about Christ, either at home or at work, with people we know or with people we don't.

That's more than just a weakness or a sad reality of life. It's sin. God calls us to preach his word boldly. He calls us to put him first in our lives, no matter what the cost here. And we rotten sinners refuse to do that. Whatever excuses we come up with, it's still disobedience. And it deserves God's punishment in hell forever. But that's exactly why Jesus came. Jesus came because we were born disobedient sinners and because we continue to live that way even after God gives us faith. Jesus came because the only ending that we could ever achieve to our lives is death and hell afterward. And he didn't want that to happen to us. So he lived the life of perfect testimony that we can never live. Then he died and paid for all our failures to testify. He suffered the death and hell we deserve. Then he rose and wiped all that sin away. God forgives our fear and our failure to boldly speak his word. Jesus rose and he promises us eternal life with him.

Then he sent that message to us. When it came, the Holy Spirit came with it. He changed us. Not only did he break the power of the old man that lives in our hearts, he put a new man there, a believer, who loves the Lord and hears his word and loves to share it. That believer in you loves to hear your children talk and sing about Jesus. That believer in you rejoices when you get to tell them about your Savior. That believer in you wants to tell the whole world the good news of what Jesus has done for you. That believer gets his power from the Holy Spirit working through all those promises. When you come and hear about Jesus, you are filling up with the Holy Spirit. You are recharging that new believer inside you to fight against the fear and doubt and pride and weakness that keeps you from talking about your Savior.

So you can be bold. You can talk about Jesus. Why do you think it's possible for me to stand up here and preach? It's not about being smart or talented or anything like that. I struggle with all the same anxieties you do. For the first several years I was in the ministry, I almost never slept on nights before I had to preach. To this day, I don't eat breakfast before preaching. If I have a message that I know is going to be hard for some people to hear, sometimes I stand in the sacristy before church asking God to give me the courage to get the words out. It's not about the public speaking. I can do that. It's about the same anxiety that you have when God calls you to actually speak his words. If you ever hear the message you needed to hear in this building, it's because the Holy Spirit answered those prayers. He came to me in the gospel and filled me with his promises and enabled me to preach to you today.

You are no harder a nut for God to crack than I am. Now, God doesn't call all of us to be pastors or teachers. But he does call all of us to be witnesses. He does call all of us to boldly speak the Word of God. Your children need to know what is really important in life. They need to hear you tell them that the Word of God says something different from what their friends tell them. They need to hear you boldly challenging the false messages of our society. And you will have opportunities to speak to people that I will never meet. God calls us to boldly speak his word. Then he gives us the power to do it. He comes in the gospel and he fills our hearts.

And you know what's really amazing? When we feel like we failed, when we trembled and we could barely get the words out, he still works. First of all, he works in the sense that he covers our failures with the blood of Christ. To God, every time we speak, it's as if Jesus himself were speaking, so God sees us as bold and perfect in our speaking. And he works in the sense that the power isn't in our style, but in the gospel itself. He can take the softest, most timid witness and touch a heart with it. He can take the most awkward and stumbling effort, and change a life with it. God is working through you when you speak his message. Be bold because you have the power of the Holy Spirit!

God knows better than we do how hard this is for us. But he still calls us to be his witnesses. In fact, he makes us the crucial link in his plan to save the world. My friends, **speak the word of Christ boldly in accordance with God's plan.**

Luke says, **“When they heard this** [that is, the command to stop preaching the gospel], **they** [the church] **raised their voices together in prayer to God.”** But he doesn't tell us who led the prayer. Almost certainly, Peter or John or someone else spoke the words out loud while the congregation prayed silently. But God chooses to emphasize the fact that this was the response of the whole congregation to persecution.

In the prayer, they quoted Psalm 2 in which God speaks of what would happen to Christ. The kings of the earth – Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, Caiaphas and the rest of the Jewish ruling council – took their stand against God and his Anointed One – that is, against his Christ. A thousand years before Jesus was arrested and hauled before one petty ruler after another, God said all this was going to happen. And it was supposed to happen that way. Again, the people prayed, **“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. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”**

Jesus didn't die by accident. He didn't lose the political contest for the hearts and minds of Israel. He didn't get caught up in the power politics of the Roman Empire. Jesus died because that was always God's plan. Again and again in the Old Testament, God gives us prophetic images of his Son dying to save his people. God knew that unbelievers wouldn't be able to stand hearing Jesus preach. So he used them to do what he wanted done. Jesus had to die because we deserve to die. Jesus had to suffer hell on the cross, because our sin demands hell. And Jesus had to rise again on the third day because that was the only way to rescue us from the grave. To rise, he had to die. So God planned from eternity for all these events to take place. Then he made sure that they did.

But that wasn't the end of God's plan. Forty days after Jesus died, he ascended into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of the Father. In that position of power and glory, he runs the world for us, his Church. And when the time is right, he will return and judge the world and take us to live with him forever. So why doesn't he just come back now? Because God's plan also includes bringing to faith all those whom God chose to believe. The only way he does that is through the gospel. The plan is for the good news about Jesus to go out into all the world and bring those people to faith. And God uses us to carry that plan out. He uses churches to call pastors and teachers and missionaries and then he uses those workers to do his work. And he uses Christian parents to teach their children about Jesus. He uses Christian friends to comfort and encourage each other when life hurts. He uses Christian members to share the good news with people who still don't know him.

Who is up to such a task? On our own, we could only fail God. So he changed us. He gave us that new man. He gave us the gospel in the word and the sacraments to touch our hearts over and over again. He gave us the Holy Spirit who keeps coming back to us and renewing and recharging us so that we can do the work he calls us to do. And then he keeps sending us out to do the work.

You are a part of God's plan. You have the power of God in the gospel. You have the Holy Spirit living in you by faith. You have a new man who loves to serve and to share. It seems like we are the worst possible choices to make God's plan work. But he has changed us and made us the best choice. He has stacked the deck in our favor and he will bless all our efforts to speak his words. Know that and be bold. Speak the Word of Christ to each other, to your children and to the world around you. God will make that Word work. Amen.