

In Acts chapter 4 we see what happens when the risen Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, collides with religious power. The same Peter who once cowered in fear now stands firm before the very men who condemned Jesus. The chapter shows us opposition, boldness, prayer, and a radically generous community—and it calls every believer to costly obedience and every non-believer to a clear decision about Jesus.

#### **4:1–4 – Opposition to the resurrection**

*Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. (Acts 4:1–4)*

While Peter and John are still speaking to the crowd about Jesus and His resurrection, the religious establishment moves in. The priests, the captain of the temple, and especially the Sadducees are “greatly disturbed.” The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, angels, or spirits. Now Peter and John are standing in the temple, proclaiming that God has raised Jesus from the dead. Their message directly contradicts Sadducean theology and threatens their influence.

So the authorities arrest them and hold them overnight. Yet even as the apostles are taken into custody, the word of God is not bound. Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men alone grew to about five thousand. Opposition could not stop the gospel; in some ways, it seems to have stirred it.

#### **Application for believers:**

Do not be surprised when the core of our message—the bodily resurrection of Jesus—is resisted or ridiculed. Many worldviews will tolerate Jesus as a teacher or example, but stumble over a crucified and risen Lord. Stay faithful. God can use even opposition to spread His word.

#### **4:5–12 – Peter’s Spirit-filled defense and the uniqueness of Jesus**

*And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:5–7)*

The entire religious leadership gathers—the same circle that engineered the death of Jesus. They put Peter and John in the center like defendants in a courtroom and ask the key question: “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

In their law, if someone performed a sign and tried to lead people to a different god, that person was a false prophet and worthy of death (see Deuteronomy 13:1–5). So this is not an innocent question; it is a legally loaded trap.

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, 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 Him this man stands here before you whole.” (Acts 4:8–10)*

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answers without hesitation. First, he points out the absurdity of the situation: they are on trial for helping a man who had been lame for over forty years. Then he gives a direct and fearless answer. This healing happened “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”—the very Jesus they crucified, whom God raised from the dead. The living Jesus is still at work, and the healed man standing before them is evidence.

*“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11–12)*

Peter quotes from Psalm 118, a passage the leaders knew well as a Messianic text. The “builders” (Israel’s leaders) rejected the stone God chose, but God has made that rejected stone the cornerstone of His saving work.

Then Peter makes one of the clearest and most exclusive claims in all of Scripture:

“There is no other name...by which we must be saved.” Salvation is not found in religion, rituals, or personal goodness. It is not found in any other spiritual leader or philosophy. Jesus, who shed His blood on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead, is God’s appointed way of salvation. He is not one option among many; He is the only Savior.

### **Challenge for believers:**

In a culture that pressures us to say that “all paths are basically the same,” Acts 4:12 will test whether we are willing to stand with Scripture. Are we prepared, in love and humility, to confess that Jesus alone saves—even if people label that narrow or intolerant?

### **Invitation for non-believers:**

If you have been treating Jesus as one option among many, this passage confronts you with a choice. God has provided a way for your sins to be forgiven: Jesus died on the cross for you, shedding His blood so that you could be cleansed, and God raised Him from the dead to show that He truly is God, Savior, and Lord. There is no other name that can save you. You are invited—not forced—to receive Him.

### **4:13–14 – Seen as ordinary, marked by Jesus**

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (Acts 4:13–14)*

The leaders are astonished. Peter and John did not have formal rabbinic training, but they speak with clarity, courage, and a deep grasp of Scripture. The council writes them off outwardly as “uneducated and untrained,” but they cannot deny one crucial fact: “they had been with Jesus.”

And there stands the healed man, a living, walking, undeniable sign of the power of Jesus’ name. With him standing there, they “*could say nothing against it.*”

**Application for believers:**

The most powerful credential you will ever have is not your degree, your title, or your personality—it is that you have been with Jesus. Time in His presence changes how you speak, how you respond under pressure, and how you treat people. Ask the Lord to make His presence in your life so evident that those around you can tell that you walk with Him.

**4:15–22 – “We cannot but speak”**

*But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” (Acts 4:15–17)*

The leaders admit among themselves what they will not admit in public: a “notable miracle” has happened, and everyone knows it. They cannot deny the fact, so they try to control the message. Their plan is not to refute the resurrection or the healing, but to silence any further testimony.

*So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:18)*

Here is a direct collision: human authority forbids what Jesus has commanded.

*But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19–20)*

Peter and John respond with respectful defiance. They put the issue in simple terms: Is it right to obey God or human beings when the two conflict? You decide, they say, but as for us, we cannot be silent. What they have seen and heard about Jesus is burning in them; to stop talking about Him would be to betray reality itself.

After further threats, the leaders let them go, afraid of the people who are glorifying God because of the miracle.

**Application for believers:**

Most of us are not yet facing prison for speaking in Jesus’ name. But we do face pressure—from workplaces, schools, social circles, or simply the fear of awkwardness—to keep quiet about Him. Acts 4 reminds us that there is a time when loyalty to Jesus is more important than social comfort or even official approval. Ask God for a heart that says, “I cannot but speak what I have seen and heard.”

**4:23–31 – The church’s prayer for boldness, not safety**

*And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. (Acts 4:23)*

Released from a hostile environment, Peter and John return to their spiritual family. They share the threats and commands they have just received. The church's immediate response is to pray together.

*So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them..." (Acts 4:24)*

Notice how their prayer begins. They do not start with their fear or their enemies; they start with God—Creator of heaven, earth, sea, and everything in them. They remind themselves whom they are talking to. When we begin prayer by fixing our eyes on God's greatness, our problems are put back into perspective.

They then quote Psalm 2, recognizing that opposition to Jesus is not a surprise to God but a fulfillment of His word:

*"Why did the nations rage,  
And the people plot vain things?  
The kings of the earth took their stand,  
And the rulers were gathered together  
Against the Lord and against His Christ." (Acts 4:25–26)*

They see Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel as fulfilling exactly what God had foretold:

*"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done." (Acts 4:27–28)*

They acknowledge two realities at once: real human responsibility and God's sovereign purpose. People acted in rebellion, yet God used even their opposition to carry out His plan—the crucifixion of Jesus, where He shed His blood to save us.

Only after grounding themselves in who God is and what He has said do they present their request:

*"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29–30)*

They do not ask for the persecution to stop. They do not ask for easier circumstances. They ask for boldness to keep speaking God's word, and for Jesus to continue to work powerfully through them.

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

God answers clearly. The place is shaken, they are freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, and they do exactly what they prayed for—the church speaks the word of God with boldness.

### **Application for believers:**

What do our prayers sound like when opposition or pressure comes? Are we mainly asking God to

remove difficulties, or are we asking Him to make us faithful and bold in the middle of them? Ask the Lord to reshape your praying so that His purposes, not your comfort, are central.

#### **4:32–37 – A generous, unified community and the example of Barnabas**

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. (Acts 4:32)

The same Spirit who gave them boldness also knit their hearts together. They were “of one heart and one soul.” Their unity was not just emotional; it affected their wallets and their daily decisions. No one clung tightly to personal possessions. Instead, they saw their resources as entrusted by God for the good of the whole body.

*And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)*

The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of Jesus—not just in words, but in power. The community’s life of love and generosity was itself a witness. “Great grace” rested on them; the favor of God was clearly evident.

*Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:34–35)*

Out of love, some believers who owned property sold it and brought the proceeds to the apostles, who then distributed to those in need. This was voluntary, Spirit-prompted generosity, not forced redistribution. Their desire was that no brother or sister go without basic needs while others had more than enough.

This kind of sharing had challenges and, as later chapters show, was sometimes abused. Scripture still affirms the importance of personal responsibility and work. But Acts 4 shows us the heart of the early church: open-handed, sacrificial, and eager to care for one another in practical ways.

*And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. (Acts 4:36–37)*

Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”) is introduced as a living example of this generosity. He sells a piece of land and quietly lays the money at the apostles’ feet. His nickname matches his character: we will see him later encouraging new believers, standing up for the rejected, and partnering in missionary work. Here we meet him as a man who loves God and God’s people more than his possessions.

#### **Application for believers:**

Grace that forgives also transforms. If we truly believe that Jesus shed His blood for us and rose again, then we know that our lives and resources are not really our own. Ask the Lord to show you how you can live more open-handedly: helping someone in need, supporting gospel work, or quietly meeting a practical need in your church family.

## A closing challenge and invitation

### For believers:

Acts 4 presses several questions into our hearts:

- When the message of Jesus is unpopular or resisted, will we still confess that there is no other name by which we must be saved?
- When authorities or social pressures push us to be silent, will we say with Peter and John, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”?
- When we pray, are we asking mainly for safety and comfort, or for boldness and faithfulness?
- Are we living as a family in Christ—sharing life, resources, and burdens—or as isolated individuals who simply attend the same meetings?

Ask the Lord to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit, to give you boldness to speak, and to shape you into a person of encouragement and generosity like Barnabas.

### For non-believers or unsure hearts:

This chapter also brings you to a simple, unavoidable question: What will you do with Jesus?

God has already acted. Jesus, the stone that the builders rejected, went to the cross willingly. He shed His blood there to pay for your sins—every failure, every rebellion, every hidden shame. God raised Him from the dead, declaring once for all that Jesus is God, Savior, and Lord. There is no other name given under heaven by which you must be saved.

You are invited to turn to Him. Repent—turn from your sin and your self-rule—and trust Him as your Savior and Lord. You can pray something like this:

*“Lord Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and that God raised You from the dead. I confess that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I turn from my sin and ask You to forgive me, cleanse me, and make me new. I receive You as my Savior and Lord. Take my life and lead me from this day forward.”*

The words themselves are not magic, but if this is truly the desire of your heart, Jesus will hear you. The One who stood with Peter and John will stand with you—and the same risen Lord who gave them boldness and grace will begin to reshape your life from the inside out.