

The Fear Factor - Acts 4:1-31

Introduction

- You know, when I was younger, one of my greatest fears was public speaking. I mean it terrified me. I hated it.
- We all know that feeling, don't we? Everyone feels it for mostly different reasons, though there are a few things that seem to just be fears that are common to the human race. I think Evangelism is one of those things. There are a gifted few who don't really seem to have that fear, but I'd say they're much more the exception. Most of us get so nervous when it comes to sharing good news of Christ.
- In Acts 4:1-4 we see a good example of one of the reasons most of us are so afraid when it comes to this. This passage shows the opposition that Peter and John, two of Jesus' disciples faced as they shared about the resurrection of Christ, and performed healings in Jesus' name. Yet as we read, we see throughout this passage, which Chiara just read for us, that that opposition did nothing to stop them from sharing the Gospel, and as a result they saw some pretty amazing things happen.
- So the question to ask is this: How did they do it? How were they able to so confidently and boldly declare the Gospel even in the face of such opposition, with the threat of imprisonment?
- Well I think that in this passage we see 4 different keys that help Peter and John to share about Christ so boldly without fear, and as we look through we're going to see how we can learn from their example and overcome our own fear of evangelism by looking at what they do.
- We're going to look at each of these four keys that we see in this passage, the 4 things that we need in order to be able to share the Gospel boldly and without fear, just like Peter and John, then we're going to end off with looking at something that we don't need to be able to share the Gospel, and the hope is that by the end of looking at this passage, the end of this series, we will all be energized and ready to go out into our lives to share the Gospel with others.

Key #1 - Conviction

- The first key that I want us to look at today is conviction.
- When Peter and John are arrested and brought before the council, they are asked by what authority they are preaching and healing, look at their response in V. 9-12.

“if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 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 him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” - Acts 4:9-12 (ESV)

- They take that moment to boldly and confidently proclaim again the name of Christ, and his resurrection and victory over death, the very thing that got them arrested in the first place.. Then look at V. 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, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”” - Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)

- When Peter and John are commanded to stop preaching about the resurrection of Christ, they respond with these powerful words, *“We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”*
- They couldn’t do anything else. It was unthinkable to them that they would keep quiet about what they had seen and heard.
- They were facing opposition, dangerous opposition. The same people who had Jesus killed, yet they continued to proclaim the Gospel. Why?
- Because they were convicted, absolutely convinced that what they were preaching about was the truth, and that truth was greater than any opposition.
- They were putting everything on the line here. They were going against their very culture and heritage, and there would have been hugely devastating implications for that.
- And not only was their cultural identity on the line, but their very lives.
- This calls to mind certain passages by Paul in the book of Romans.

- Romans 8:31

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” - Rom. 8:31 (ESV)

- Romans 8:38-39

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Rom. 8:38-39 (ESV)

- Romans 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” - Rom. 1:16 (ESV)

- This is one of the reasons that I said a few weeks ago that we need to be reminding ourselves of the Gospel every day.
- If we are going to share the Gospel without fear, we need to have this same kind of conviction, certainty that what we are sharing is true.
- We need to believe this message with our whole heart, and know that Christ is greater than any opposition we will ever face. Paul says that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Do you believe that?
- Peter and John did. They believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that even if the religious leaders did put them to death, they would enjoy eternity with Christ, so ultimately there was nothing the religious leaders could do that would outweigh what Christ had already done.
- And you see this conviction follow through in the fact that both Peter and John were eventually killed on behalf of Christ, because of the Gospel they were proclaiming.
- If we are going to share the Gospel boldly, and without fear, we first need conviction that the message we're sharing is the truth.

Key #2 - Community

- The second key to the boldness we see in Peter and John is community.
- Look at what happens immediately after they are released in V. 23

“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.” - Rom. 4:23 (ESV)

- You see, Peter and John were not alone in what they were doing.
- As they were sharing the Gospel, people trusted in Christ, and their community grew. And they relied on that community. They were not isolated, and alone in what they were doing, they had a community of believers around them, supporting them, and praying for them.
- As soon as they were let out of custody, they immediately went to their friends to report all that had happened with the priests.
- It was important for them to be connected to this community of believers to receive support in these times of opposition and struggle.
- As we go and share the Gospel, we can think that we're on some solo mission to save the world, and it all rests on our shoulders. That is not true.
- Even look at the fact that Peter and John were doing all of this together. We are not alone in this.
- V. 32-37, later in the passage, also talk about the beginnings of the church, the entire book of Acts is all about the spreading of the Gospel and the establishing of the church, and these

verses give a good look into that community, and the love and the care that they had for one another.

- We need to be connected to our community here, so that we are able to support one another in this mission.
- We are all a part of the body of Christ. The parts of the body are not meant to be off doing their own thing until Sunday, when suddenly we're a body again until the end of the service.
- We're supposed to always be supporting and encouraging one another in the mission that Christ has given us of sharing the Gospel.
- If I am nervous to go and share the Gospel with my neighbours, it should encourage me that I am able to lean on the support of Liberty Grace in that.
- So how do we support one another? This leads into key #3

Key #3 - Prayer

- The first key was conviction, the second was community, and the third key that we need in order to share the Gospel Boldly without fear is prayer.
- Look at what Peter and John do with the other believers as soon as they've made their report (v. 24)

“And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God” - Acts 4:24a (ESV)

- They lifted up their voices to God. This community of believers prayed for one another, and prayed with one another.
- V. 24-30 is just their prayer, and look at some of the elements of this prayer.
- they acknowledge God's kingship over the earth at the end of V. 24

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them” - Acts 4:24b (ESV)

- they acknowledge that there is opposition, though that opposition has no power against God in V. 27

“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel” - Acts 4:27 (ESV)

- They do not ask for the threats to go away, just for boldness to speak in V. 29

"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness" - Acts 4:29 (ESV)

- They do not ask for the power to do great things, but that God would do great things, and that his name would be praised.

"while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." - Acts 4:30 (ESV)

- This should inform our prayers as we are praying with and for one another in our mission to share the Gospel. Acknowledge our fear, acknowledge that God is greater than our fear, and pray that he would give us boldness, and would work through us.
- This is the role of our community, and the greatest way that we can encourage one another in sharing the Gospel.
- Each Tuesday when we get together for Grace Group we always spend the last little while in small groups praying for one another, and on the first Tuesday of each month we have an evening dedicated just to prayer. These are such encouraging times, and if you have not previously been a part of these evenings, I would really encourage you to come out on Tuesday nights. It's so important for us as a church to be praying for one another, and it is a big part of giving us the boldness that we need to share the Gospel without fear.
- Again, this leads into the next key.

Key #4 - The Holy Spirit

- The final key that we need to share our faith boldly without fear, which we see in this passage, is perhaps the most important out of all four of these and you can see it in V. 8 and V. 31
- When Peter spoke boldly before the council, he was filled with the Holy Spirit in V. 8

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders" - Acts 4:8 (ESV)

- When the church prayed, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and as a result they were filled with boldness to continue to speak the Gospel in V. 31.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." - Acts 4:31 (ESV)

- In the book of John we looked a bit at Jesus' promise that after he had returned to the Father, the disciples would be left with a helper from God, the Holy Spirit, who had come at Pentecost, which we'll talk a bit more about in a few weeks.
- Throughout the book of Acts we see a number of examples of people being filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore empowered to do the work of God.
- This is such an important one to remember, because we have to remember that when we're sharing the Gospel, the real work isn't being done by us at all.
- You know, at the end of the day, it is never our responsibility to save people. There is nothing that you or I can do to change someone's heart. That work is done by the Holy Spirit.
- We're not responsible to make sure people respond to the message that we're sharing, but we are given the responsibility to share it, and we're given the Holy Spirit to help us in that.
- If you look at people in the Bible and wonder how they could have possibly been so bold in sharing the Gospel, the answer is right there. It's because of the Holy Spirit in them. And if you've given your life to Christ, you also have the Holy Spirit inside of you to help you share the Gospel with the same boldness. So as you pray, for yourself, and for others, pray that God would empower us with the Holy Spirit to share the good news of Christ.

Conclusion - You don't need a master's degree

- So those are the four keys that we see in this passage. The four things that Peter and John's story teaches us we need to follow their example and preach the Gospel boldly without fear. Conviction, community, prayer, and the Holy Spirit.
- Now as we've been looking at what we need to share the Gospel without fear, especially with that last one in mind, I want to end with looking at something that we don't need in order to share the Gospel without fear.
- Look at V. 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." - Acts 4:13 (ESV)

- Peter and John were not scholars. The priests would have spent their entire life being trained, and studying the Scriptures. Peter and John did not have that training. All they had was their experience with Jesus, the time that they spent with him, and the gift of the Holy Spirit which had been given to them. They didn't need anything else.
- Don't tell yourself that you'll start sharing the Gospel once you've heard x number of sermons, or maybe if you just read one more book, etc. etc. etc.

- Don't discourage yourself and say that you're not smart enough, or good enough to share the Gospel well. If you have heard and accepted the Gospel, you have all that you need to share it.
- Because this passage shows that you don't need some kind of special education to share the Gospel. You need conviction, you need community, you need prayer, and you need the Holy Spirit, but you do not need a masters degree to share the good news of Christ, and how he's worked in your life.
- Our hope is not in us, but in the power of the Gospel, and the name that we are proclaiming.
- And I'll end with this. Look at what the passage says happens when Peter and John proclaim the Gospel boldly and without fear, even in the face of harsh opposition.

“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” - Acts 4:4 (ESV)

- When they were willing to share the good news of Christ, people responded.
- That doesn't mean that every time you share the Gospel you will see 5000 people come to faith, but you will never waste your time in sharing the Gospel with someone, and there is not one Gospel conversation that will be a waste.
- God honours our willingness to share the good news, and he will always work in some way when his word is proclaimed.
- So remember these things. You don't need a masters degree to share the good news of Christ, you need conviction, community, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Pray that God would give us the boldness to share the Gospel without fear with those around us, and pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in us as we share, and in the hearts of those who hear this message.