



"THERE IS
SALVATION IN NO
ONE ELSE, FOR
THERE IS NO OTHER
NAME UNDER
HEAVEN GIVEN
TO PEOPLE BY
WHICH WE MUST
BE SAVED."

ACTS 4:12

THE POWER

TO STAND

DATE

October 17 & 18

WEEK

3 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 3-4

KEY VERSE

Acts 4:12

SETTING THE STAGE

The power of the gospel continues to change lives in Acts. Chapters 3 and 4 show both physical and spiritual changes to the lives of people who are open to the gospel. The audience of these chapters is Jewish, including high ranking officials who could be intimidating. Yet, Peter and John knew they were not speaking in their own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit. They knew that although Jesus was no longer with them physically, the power and authority was still there in spirit and truth.

In this chapter, Peter goes from preaching to the masses to fixing his gaze on a beggar who was lame since birth, making the message and power of the gospel personal. This healing is the first of fourteen miracles in the book of Acts.¹ Though there was and would continue to be opposition along the way, Peter and John have found a new boldness. They have matured from the men they were mere months before in the Upper Room with Jesus, and when they scattered in the garden at the arrest of Jesus. It was at the foot of the cross that Jesus asked John to care for His mother, Mary. It was on the beach that Jesus asked Peter to shepherd the sheep. Peter and John had indeed matured in their faith, their responsibility, and their boldness. They were learning firsthand what it meant to have the power to stand.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Standing in Jesus' Name
2. Standing with Boldness
3. Standing in Unity

THINGS TO KNOW

- Peter and John are continuing the ministry that had begun almost four years before on the shores of Galilee when they were called by Jesus to "follow Him."
- The Greek word "Parresia" means "boldness, courage, confidence, openness." It occurs five times in Acts, three times in Chapter 4 alone.²

THE POWER TO STAND

Introduction

It was May of 1940. Three hundred thousand British troops were retreating across France fleeing the Nazi war machine. The Germans had devastated the British Expeditionary Force and were now sending warplanes to raid the English coast. A Nazi invasion of the British Isles loomed. With her army in shambles and no allies (this was 18 months before the USA entered the war), Britain appeared ready to fall. Members of the British War Cabinet pressured Prime Minister Winston Churchill to either sue for peace or resign his office. They thought their country could not stand in the face of such evil.

But Churchill refused to entertain surrender. He told Parliament:

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. (Winston Churchill, "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat," Speech Before Parliament, London: May 13, 1940.)³

Churchill and Great Britain would stand up to the Nazis, and they paid a high cost over the next year as the Germans dropped thousands of tons of bombs on their island. But German boots never touched the English shoreline, and Great Britain kept standing until—with help—they won their victory.

Today's lesson in Acts reminds us that Christians have the power to stand up in the face of significant opposition and win an eternal victory. In Acts 3 and 4, we will see how God's power gives us the strength to stand in Jesus' name, stand with boldness, and stand in unity with the church.

1. STANDING IN JESUS' NAME

ACTS 3:1-5 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. ² And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about



¹ www.soniclight.com/acts

² www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

³ <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/blood-toil-tears-and-sweat/>

to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. ⁴ But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” ⁵ And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. They had no other agenda than to worship God through a time of prayer. But a lame man is there, as he probably was most days, begging alms from those entering the temple. This lame man did not go there because he heard about Peter and John, nor did he go to worship God through prayer; he was trying to survive another day. This was a common scene near the temple.

While Peter and John were going to pray, they heard this man and “fixed their gaze” on him. They chose not to walk by ignoring the man but to stop long enough to focus on him. And then they took the lead and said, “Look at us!” They wanted to make eye contact with this man who was begging for alms aimlessly. This lame beggar “began to give them his attention,” fully expecting something to be readily given to him, food, money, a token of some sort. They did not have anything tangible for him, but what they had would be life-changing.

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ACTS 3:6-8 “But Peter said, ‘I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!’ ⁷ Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ So he jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.”

The lame man was asking for a hand out. Instead, they gave him a hand up. The lame man is miraculously healed as the Apostle Peter helps him up and tells him to walk in Jesus’ name. An astonished crowd gathers, and Peter takes the opportunity to preach a sermon, then gets arrested, preaches another sermon, defies temple leaders, and goes home without a scratch. As a result of this miracle, more individual miracles of salvation occur as “many of those who heard the message believed.” (Acts 4:4) This episode wonderfully narrates the power God grants people to stand—both physically and spiritually—in Jesus’ name.

The man, lame “from birth” (Acts 3:2), experienced physical power to stand. Like the man born blind in John 9, the lame man’s condition is not a consequence of his personal sin but a consequence of being born into a fallen and sinful world. Suffering like this was not part of God’s original creation, and it will not be part of our heavenly home. But for now, many of us suffer the effects of living in a fallen world, and it can make us feel powerless.

But God is not powerless. Scripture promises that these “present sufferings” are “not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). And God gives glimpses of that glory throughout Scripture in the form of miracles. One theologian defines miracles as “a less common kind of God’s activity in which He arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.”⁴ The lame man’s healing is a perfect example of such an activity. However, the end result was not the miracle itself. It was pointing to something more substantial, and Peter made it clear that it was pointing to Christ,

ACTS 3:16 “And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, p. 355.

When Peter says, “By faith in His name, the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man...” he is not saying that Jesus’ name works like a “magic word” to heal diseases. Instead, he is faithfully declaring the life-giving power and authority of Jesus over the lame man’s suffering. A “name” throughout the Bible often explains everything true about a person.⁵ So, when Peter says, “in His name, the name of Jesus,” he is preaching a mini-sermon that he would elaborate in Acts 3:12-26. Peter is saying that Jesus is alive and powerful (Acts 3:14-15; 26). He is saying that Jesus is God’s promised Messiah, who would restore creation (Acts 3:21). Finally, he is explaining that Jesus is co-equal with God since only God has the power to heal (Deuteronomy 32:39). The life, promise, and power of God come to people through the person of Jesus Christ.

When Peter says, “By faith in His name...” (Acts 3:16) he is likely declaring his own faith in the person and power of Jesus. This should encourage Christians to pray in faith—like Peter did—“in Jesus’ name” for the physical healing of believers and unbelievers alike. Faith is a conduit or channel that connects us to God’s gracious power in our lives.⁶ And although God does not answer every faithful prayer for physical healing with an immediate miraculous “yes,” He does promise an even greater eternal healing for those who repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ.

The greatest miracle anyone can experience is the ability to stand before God forgiven of sins, made alive with Christ, and saved for eternal life.

This greater healing is what 2,000 people experienced that day in Acts 3. Praise God for the spiritual healing and life He promises to everyone who believes “in Jesus’ name.” Physical and spiritual healing are overlapping categories in the Bible. The ability to stand physically healed is a miracle that believers should pray for “in Jesus name,” but, the greatest miracle anyone can experience is the ability to stand before God forgiven of sins, made alive with Christ, and saved for eternal life. And that too is “in His name.” As Peter tells the temple leaders the next day, “There is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name under heaven** given to people by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

2. STANDING WITH BOLDNESS

ACTS 4:13-14 “When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition.” (ESV)

You would think that the miraculous healing of a man born lame and the miraculous conversion of 2,000 souls would quiet any opposition to the early church. In fact, it only stirred up the resistance. Acts 4 begins with the city leaders being “greatly annoyed” by the Apostles’ teaching, specifically about the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:2). So, they arrested them, threw them in jail for the night, and brought them before the high priest for questioning.

Remember that John and Peter had been here before knowing what had happened to Jesus after He had been arrested and taken before the high priest for what would be one of six illegal trials. The temptation to fear must have been nauseating as they walked the same path that led to Jesus’ crucifixion. But in their time of fear, God supplied them with boldness to stand and speak the truth about Jesus.

⁵ John B. Polhill, *ESV Study Bible*, note on Acts 3:16, p. 2086.

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, Pensacola, Fl. Chapel Library, 2015, p. 44-45.

The scene highlights God’s emboldening power when the priests ask the ultimate question:

ACTS 4:7-8, 10 “By what power or in what name have you done this?”⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them ‘...¹⁰ 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 have crucified and Whom God raised from the dead—by Him this man is standing here before you healthy.’”

The temple leaders may have expected these uneducated fishermen to wilt under the heat of their scare tactics, just as Peter had done in denying Christ after His arrest in the garden. However, a lot had changed in Peter’s life since then, even though it had only been a matter of months at best. Jesus had died, been buried, raised from the dead, appeared for 40 days, ascended into heaven seated at the right hand of God, sent the Holy Spirit, and birthed the church of what was now 5,000 people. In short, the Triune God’s plan for saving humanity had reached its tipping point, and Peter now had the resources to stand up and push back against the opposition.

Peter’s Spirit-filled boldness amazed and silenced the opposition, but it did not end it. Resistance to God, the gospel, and God’s people had persisted since Genesis 3:15, when God announced ongoing hostilities between His people and Satan’s minions. The early believers even reflected on this fact after Peter and John were released as they prayed Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26).

Knowing that boldness will be required of modern believers just as it was of Peter and the early church, consider three keys to standing boldly for the gospel in the face of opposition:

- **Be clear about the gospel message:** “There is Salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)
- **Fear God more than man:** “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20)
- **Pray:** “When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.” (Acts 4:31)

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The Holy Spirit, who filled Peter, John, and the early church with boldness, is the same Holy Spirit dwelling inside every believer. By the power He supplies, stand boldly for the gospel, and silence the opposition!

3. STANDING IN UNITY

ACTS 4:32 “Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind...”

Emblazoned on the Great Seal of the United States is the motto, *E Pluribus Unum*: “out of many, one.” The phrase is said to describe the unity of our fifty states. Though that is a principle for us today, in the first century for the early church, it was reality. We have seen the common thread of unity in the last two weeks in our lessons on the Story of Power. It was foundational for the early church to be unified in spirit, purpose, power, and message. Part of their impact in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world was their testimony of being unified as the body of Christ.

The church had inherited the poetry of David, who sang: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!” (Psalm 133:1). They also had the wisdom of David’s less-poetic-but-more-

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practical son Solomon: “if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

More importantly, they had the Holy Spirit of God, enabling them to stand in unity. Just as Acts 2 ends with a picture of the church’s devotion to “*the Apostle’s teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer*” (Acts 2:42), this episode of Acts ends with a similar picture of church unity. In fact, a closer look at the whole of Acts 3-4 shows three clear types of unity among the early church that churches today should strive to emulate.

A. United around the Word

After His resurrection, Jesus told the disciples that “*everything written about [Him] in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled*” (Luke 24:44). Then He “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:45). As a result, Peter, John, and the early church were devouring their Bibles, which for them would be our Old Testament. This is clear from the fact that whenever they speak in Acts, they directly quote or allude to Scripture. In Acts 3-4, the Apostles reference the Old Testament at least nine separate times (Acts 3:13, 18, 21, 22-23, 24, 25; 4:11, 24, 25-26). And they are especially clear about one critical biblical fact: Jesus Christ fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. (Acts 3:18; 4:27-28).

Churches today should be equally united around God’s Word. And like the Apostles, we should view Scripture in a Christ-centered way. Moreover, because the Apostles were living, breathing, witnesses to Jesus Christ, and because Jesus had “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*” their words recorded in the 27 books of the New Testament should unite churches even today.

Just as the lame man was “*holding on to Peter and John*” even after he had gained the ability to jump, walk, and leap (Acts 3:11), churches should “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching” found in the Bible (2 Timothy 1:13). Churches that fail to unite around God’s Word almost always lose the gospel clarity, fear of God, and prayer commitment that are necessary to stand against dark forces that oppose God’s people.

B. United in Order

It is also clear from Acts 3-4 that the early church was committed to order. Some people consider the early church as an ancient hippie commune with no rules. They might point to the sense of awe, the impromptu gatherings, and the sharing of their wealth as evidence. But such a view overlooks evidence pointing to order:

- **Leadership:** The Apostles held unquestioned authority over the rest of the church (Acts 5:13).
- **Gatherings:** Until the church is scattered in Acts 8, the center of their meeting was the temple (Acts 2:46) at set daily prayer times (Acts 3:1).
- **Message:** The Apostles preaching in Jerusalem consistently focuses on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, the resurrection, and the call for repentance and faith (Acts 3:12-26).
- **Sharing:** Acts describes the way the church shared possessions in an orderly way, with property liquidated then distributed through the Apostles. When this became a burden for the Apostles, they created a new office to handle distribution (Acts 6:2-5).

The Apostles modeled orderly worship and fellowship. Great churches unite in much the same way today. They follow trustworthy leaders as prescribed by Scripture. They gather consistently in one location, starting and finishing services on time. They teach from an organized body of

biblical doctrine. They create processes for meeting members' needs. By keeping order, churches ensure that they will spread the gospel in their community for as long as possible.

C. United in Meeting Needs

Jesus said: *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21), and the early church showed their *“one heart”* most clearly in the way they shared wealth and possessions. The example of the church in Acts 4:32-35 sounds impossible to attain for some Christians today. *“Claiming no possessions,” “selling houses and lands,”* and *“no needy people”* run against the grain of modern American experience. Two things help us apply this Scripture.

First, some believers need to feel challenged by this text. Greed is a sin that continues to tempt Christians long after they turn their lives over to Christ – especially in a wealthy country like the United States. If you are struggling with greed, look for the need in your church and seek to meet it. If you are struggling with need, be patiently encouraged by the Apostles. At the beginning of Acts 3, Peter said they had *“neither silver nor gold,”* but by the end of Acts 4, there was not a needy person among them.

Second, for churches today, the principles of generosity in meeting needs still apply. Likely, these early Christians were still tithing at the temple in addition to the sharing of possessions and assets. Of special concern was freeing up the Apostles up to pray, study, and preach God's Word. (Acts 6:4) The focus was on meeting fellow believers' needs for the sake of spreading the gospel.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

By October of 1940, the Royal Air Force had shot down hundreds of German bombers and saved their country from Nazi invasion. After that, there was no threat of the Germans taking over Great Britain. Unfortunately, the Nazis embarked on a ruthless terror campaign from November 1940 to June 1941. Night after night, they flew small missions aimed at bombing civilian targets. For Britain, the threat of falling had passed, but the brutal opposition of the Nazis remained.

Through those terrible months, Winston Churchill and his fellow Brits stood courageously committed to total victory, living under the famous motto: *“Keep Calm and Carry On.”* And just when the Brits could carry on no more, the American superpower entered the war and gave new life to the British war effort.

To be a Christian is to live in the face of an equally brutal though sometimes not as visible opponent. But God has assured His people the victory, and even when they feel weak and powerless, He is able to keep them standing in unity, standing with boldness, and standing in Jesus' name. The plan of God shapes our purpose, as we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to make a stand for all eternity.