

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Acts 4:1-13 – April 18th, 2021

Can you think of some times in your life where you might need courage and boldness? Maybe you are in a group of friends that wants to do something sinful and you need the boldness to say, “No.” Or maybe you see a brother in Christ caught in a sin and you need the courage and boldness to talk to them about it. Or maybe you have a friend who doesn’t go to church or doesn’t believe in Jesus and see an opportunity to tell them about Christ. You need courage and boldness.

On April 18th, 1521 (500 years ago today), Martin Luther did something very brave and very bold. His teachings had caused quite a stir. And the Emperor had summoned him to a meeting, called a Diet, in the city of Worms. The day before April 18th, Luther appeared before the Diet and they asked him two questions: Are these your writings? Will you retract them? Luther asked for a day to consider. And on April 18th he said to the emperor and all those gathered there: “Unless I’m convinced by Scripture or by plain reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything.” And either then or later he added the words, “Here I stand.” Where does one get that kind of boldness?

This is an important question for us to answer because even though we won’t have a “Here I Stand” moment on the scale that Luther did, we will have moments in our lives where we’ll have to take a stand. We’ll have to take a stand against temptation. We’ll have to take a stand against our own sins that we struggle with. How are we going to get the boldness to do that?

Well I think we get some help today from the Apostle Peter. There was a time in Peter’s life when he thought he would be bold in any situation. But then he was humbled. Peter had said that he would never disown Jesus (Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:31). But then Jesus was arrested and led to the former high priest Annas and the current high priest Caiaphas (John 18:12-13, 28; Matthew 26:57). Peter followed behind and came into the courtyard of the high priest. There in the courtyard people asked him if he had been with Jesus of Galilee, but instead of being bold and courageous, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Now in our passage for today from the book of Acts, Peter finds himself in front of the very people who had put Jesus to death. It says, “**Annas the high priest was there, and so [was] Caiaphas...**” (Acts 4:6).¹ These were the very people who had put Jesus to death. Would Peter deny Jesus again like he had in the courtyard?

They asked Peter, “**By what power or by what name did you do this?**” (Acts 4:7) They were referring to the healing of the man who couldn’t walk that we heard about last week. They asked him, by what *name* did you do this? Peter could have again denied the name of Jesus, but this time Peter is bold. He starts out by saying that they had not committed a crime. They had done a deed of kindness. And then he said, if you want to know how he was healed, “**then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...that**

¹ Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

this man stands before you healed” (Acts 4:10). Before, Peter denied that he knew Jesus of Nazareth. Now he says Jesus of Nazareth was the name by which this man was healed. And he adds the title *Christ*. He says Jesus *Christ* of Nazareth. Peter had to know that this would grate on their ears. The high priest had asked Jesus, **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed One?”** And Jesus had said, **“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62).** This had made the high priest so angry that he tore his clothes and accused Jesus of blasphemy (Mark 14:63-64). But now Peter is brave enough to say to the same high priest, **“We healed him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”**

Peter’s boldness doesn’t stop there. He accuses them of killing Jesus and rejecting God’s Messiah. **“It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone’” (Acts 4:10-11).** Jesus had quoted this same passage against the Jewish leaders, and now Peter is bold enough to use it again.

What a difference between Peter in the high priest’s courtyard and Peter now! When we need to be bold for Jesus, whether that is standing up to a sin that we struggle with, or taking to another person about a sin that they’ve fallen into, or witnessing about Jesus, are we more like Peter in the high-priest’s courtyard, or Peter here in this passage? Many times I’ve been more like Peter in the high priest’s courtyard.

How can we be more like Luther at the Diet of Worms, or Peter in this passage? Well, it starts by recognizing that the strength doesn’t come from ourselves. In verse 8 it says, **“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,” (Acts 4:8).** If we rely on our power, then we’ll be like Peter in the high priest’s courtyard, but if we rely on the strength the Holy Spirit gives, then we can be bold.

And Peter reminds us of why confessing the name of Jesus is so important: **“Salvation is found in no one else” (Acts 4:12).** It’s all about salvation. If I’m struggling with a sin, whether that sin is greed or hatred or whatever it is, then that sin wants to own me and rule over me. But Jesus set me free from that. He forgave me through his death on the cross. And his resurrection gives me power to say, **“No. I don’t need to follow that sin. I can live a new life in righteousness and holiness.”** Salvation is also the reason that we witness for Christ. Because the Jesus who died and rose to set you free also died and rose for your neighbor to set them free. But they need to know about that and believe that because salvation isn’t found in anybody or anything else. And so we speak the name of Jesus to our friends, relatives and neighbors. Because the name of Jesus is the only name that can save.

You have salvation in Jesus. You have the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. You have eternal life in Jesus. Luther had struggled with a guilty conscience. He had struggled with the fear of death. But then he realized from God’s Word that Jesus saved him. He realized that he was forgiven through faith alone. He realized that Jesus would save him from death. And when we realize that, then we can have Easter boldness too. Amen.