

Speaking with Boldness

Acts 4:23-31

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November 20, 2019

As Thanksgiving approaches and I anticipate getting stuffed, my heart is still full from our Dedication Services last weekend. When I think about what God did, my eyes fill with tears and I struggle to put my thoughts into words. I loved how loudly you sang “Great is Thy Faithfulness” to kick everything off and was really moved when everyone applauded after Revelation 5 was read (it would be great if we would regularly rejoice like that when the Scriptures are read). I didn’t want the song, “Is He Worthy?” to end. Another highlight was seeing so many of you rededicate yourself to God’s purposes by coming up front while we sang, “Lay Me Down.”

This week the staff listed some things to celebrate and some items we need to calibrate (nice rhyming, right?). Let’s start with celebration...

- 1200 people gathered to give glory to God and to dedicate themselves afresh to His plans and purposes.
- 14 Bibles were taken by people who didn’t have Bibles. I saw two teenagers hugging their new Bibles. If you don’t have a Bible, please take one.
- Several utilized the Family Room and were able to engage with the services. During the 10:45 service, two friends and a young girl left the Family Room during the closing song and headed to the Worship Center so they could come down front during the Invitation!
- Our Nursing Mom’s room on the lower level was used by several moms.
- Sheila reported our Edge Kids loved having the extra time. She’s been able to add more teaching about missions to the lessons.
- I talked to a number of people who indicated they rededicated themselves to Christ, even though they didn’t come up to the front.

This week I contacted Fran Harvell to get her perspective on some of the changes we’ve made. This is what she wrote: *“I am absolutely thrilled by the new accessibility. The Worship Center spaces for wheelchairs and walkers are wonderful. If you need one of these, you are no longer relegated to the back row or the middle of the aisle and you can see everything now. The new full-sized elevator is excellent, not only for families with small children, but for those of us with wheels and other assorted means of getting around. I’m also happy with the*

ramp leading up to the stage in the Worship Center. If any of us in wheelchairs or walkers need to be there, we can. And don't forget the additional handicapped parking spaces [to the south] and entrance buttons. We all become disabled physically as we grow older, and I'm so grateful that the church I love has made it possible for disabled people to be included in all aspects of worship." When I asked if I could share this, Fran said, "You sure can...I'm just really happy about all of it!"

On top of all this, I'm thankful 600 Operation Christmas Child boxes were taken! They are due back this weekend. I can't wait to hear what the total amount will be. Speaking of children, our Edge Kids are sponsoring an 8-year-old boy named James from Kenya for \$40/month so he can have food and school supplies. For November and December, they are doing a penny war. The boys and girls are competing – the boys are ahead...for now.

I'm thankful to be part of a church that prioritizes ministry to our neighbors and the nations. While focusing on our facilities this past year, by God's grace we stayed on mission and expanded our outreach. Here are a couple new initiatives...

- As a way to serve our community, the Rock Island mobile library will be using our lot on Tuesday nights this winter.
- This week our deacons approved a recommendation from our missions committee to increase our missions support by \$200/month for 10 of our missionaries who served as Edgewood interns or were members here. In addition, we are increasing our giving to InterVarsity at Augie and Blackhawk from \$200 to \$400/month. This amounts to an extra \$26,400/year for our Go Team partners.

I'm also thankful we directed 10% of the one-time gifts that came in on Commitment Weekend to three of our Go Team partners – Youth Hope here in the QCA, to the Contreras family in Fresno who used this money to prepare and furnish two apartments for women coming out of sex trafficking, and to Sam and Blessy Thomas who were able to add a room onto a parsonage for an Indian pastor.

We celebrate what God is doing and we're also working to calibrate a few things. Thanks for your patience as we make some adjustments...

- Temperature control in the Worship Center.
- Noise issues in the lobby during the services. Let's remember to use our "inside voices" in the Café area.

- Adjusting the volume in the former overflow areas.
- Setting up the Family Room with more seating.

Last weekend we were encouraged to imitate the example of Peter and John in order to weather the waves of persecution that are headed our way. This was our main idea: *We must keep speaking even when we're told not to.*

We were personally challenged to dedicate ourselves to seven resolutions.

- 1. Will you embrace opposition?**
- 2. Will you proclaim the resurrection?**
- 3. Will you be filled with the Spirit?**
- 4. Will you preach Jesus as the only way?**
- 5. Will you spend time with Jesus?**
- 6. Will you keep speaking of Jesus?**
- 7. Will you give all glory to God?**

In reflecting on the collision that takes place when culture comes up against Christianity, I recently read something by Theo Hobson called, “Marks of a Moral Revolution.”

1. What was universally condemned is now celebrated.
2. What was universally celebrated is now condemned.
3. Those who refuse to celebrate are condemned.

Our text today is Acts 4:23-31. Let's set the context. When Peter and John went up to the temple to pray, they encountered a lame man who they healed in the name of Jesus Christ. Once healed, he started leaping and praising God. Then Peter preached a sermon rooted in the resurrection and saturated it with the theme of repentance. When the religious elite heard about it, they were annoyed and arrested Peter and John.

Let's stand and read together: *“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ – 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, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ 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.”

Here’s the main idea from this passage: *Be bold and don’t fold when hard times come.* If we don’t want to fold, we need to be proactive, prayerful and prepared. First, let’s look at three ways to be proactive.

Be Proactive

1. Find support from others. The first thing Peter and John do when they’re released from jail is to join with their people. Look at [verse 23](#): *“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.”* The NASB uses the word *“companions.”* Another translation says they went to *“their own people.”* They knew they needed to be with those who had been praying for them.

Do you have a group of people you can go to when the going gets tough? Who are your people? Warren Wiersbe says, *“One test of a Christian’s character is where he finds fellowship and companionship.”* Some of us need to start hanging out with new people because the friends we have tear us down, instead of building us up. [Proverbs 13:20](#) says, *“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”*

In Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, he says it was the relationships in prison on Robben Island that got him through 30 years of suffering: *“The authority’s greatest mistake was to keep us together, for together our determination was reinforced. We supported each other and gained strength from each other. Whatever we knew, whatever we learned, we shared. And by sharing, we multiplied whatever courage we had individually. The stronger ones raised up the weaker ones and both became stronger in the process.”*

EBC member Beth Cullet, who is a very gifted writer, wrote this on her blog this week: *“I was put here for a reason, and I wasn’t put somewhere else for that very same reason. This is my time, and these are my people.”* I encourage you to read

the entire post. You can access it through the Sermon Extras tab found under the “Worship Guide” on our free mobile app.

I’m thankful we have so many groups for people to be part of at Edgewood. As an example, while we’re meeting here this weekend, our high schoolers are gathered as a group at Camp Summit.

One member of the Growth Group Beth and I host was out of town for 10 days. When she came back to our group this week, she remarked: *“I love my people here and I need biblical preaching from my church each weekend.”*

Amanda Hodge leads a 12-step group on Tuesdays and took her people through a very helpful exercise. She asked them to share what characteristics or attributes of God are helpful to remember. They filled up a white board with words like *unchanging, faithful, holy, sympathetic, trustworthy, compassionate and rescuer*. At the top of the board was this phrase, *“I can’t...but God...”*

This leads right into the second way we’re to be proactive...

2. Focus on the sovereignty of God. We read in [verse 24](#) when these faithful friends heard the report from Peter and John, they raised ***“their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.’”*** Because they gathered as God’s people, the first thing they did was praise and pray together. A primary benefit of persecution is greater solidarity. I see a pattern in [Acts 3-4](#) that is duplicated throughout the Book of Acts: *Preaching leads to persecution, which leads to praise and prayer.*

Notice what they didn’t do. They didn’t complain to the authorities. They didn’t organize a protest, attack the religious elites or boycott the temple. I like what John Piper says related to prayer: *“If you do not know life is war, you will not know what prayer is for.”* They were earnest and united as they offered urgent and unselfish adoration to the Almighty.

Two of God’s attributes are front and center for them.

- **God is King.** This is the word *“despot”* in Greek, which has the idea of a master with absolute authority. This same word is used by Simeon in [Luke 2:29](#): ***“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...”***
- **God is Creator.** God is overall because He made all. Not only did He create the Heaven and the earth and the sea, but everything in them.

Nehemiah 9:6: “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.”

Brothers and sisters, we serve a Creator who is in control of the universe. Revelation 14:7 brings these two attributes together: ***“Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*** C.S. Lewis writes: *“In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself...a proud man is always looking down on things and people...of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”*

Tim Keller is spot on when he makes this observation: *“Most people want Jesus as a consultant rather than a king.”* Kyle Idleman is also right when he writes: *“The biggest threat to the church today are fans who call themselves Christians but aren’t actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them.”*

As I reflect back on *Grow Time* this past year, I see how God sovereignly worked His plan through our problems. He even used multiple weather issues to accomplish His will, though we weren’t always happy about it. Recent delays pushed our Dedication Weekend into November but that allowed us to be in Acts 4 where we learned how to process persecution when it comes.

In our Deacon meeting this past Tuesday, we focused on how God sovereignly moved over the course of this past weekend. I mentioned the challenge of not having our adult Growth Group space and the Student Center ready yet. One of our wise deacons spoke up and said, *“Don’t tell me God is sovereign over the building project and the timing of Dedication Weekend, but He isn’t sovereign over the completion of our adult and Student Center space.”* Ouch. BTW, we are getting very close to having this space ready. The ceilings were painted this week and the walls should be finished this next week. We would not be this far along without the dedicated work of Bob Hartley, Darrick Laukaitis, Joe Kaczor, Gary Pinger, Shawn Masengarb, Bill Collins, and countless others.

After finding support from others and focusing on the sovereignty of God, we must fortify ourselves with Scripture.

3. Fortify yourself with Scripture. We move from the God of creation to the God of revelation. One of the best ways to change your thoughts is to fill your mind with the Word of God. Look at verse 25: ***“Who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit.”*** We see both the human and divine element of inspiration here. The words came through David’s mouth, but the message was from the Holy Spirit. Because of the situation they were just in, they quoted from Psalm 2:1-2: ***“Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.”***

The word for **“rage”** was used of a wild horse snorting and came to refer to someone who was haughty. Even though the people plot, their plans are empty, aimless and in vain. Psalm 2:4 tells us what God does when He sees how proud people are: ***“He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord holds them in derision.”*** We see something similar in Isaiah 8:10: ***“Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.”***

David predicts a time when kings and rulers will come ***“against the Lord and against His anointed.”*** The word anointed is *“Christos,”* which refers to the Messiah. Because these followers of Christ knew their Bibles, they were able to see what was predicted some 900 years earlier had been fulfilled right there in Jerusalem. Look at verse 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.”***

Because they were saturated with Scripture, they understood God was weaving His will and His ways according to His sweet supremacy. The best kind of prayers are filled with Scripture. Even though what the people did was evil, it’s exactly what God had foreordained to happen according to verse 28: ***“To do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”*** God’s **“hand”** represents His work and His **“plan”** represents His will.

There’s certainly a mystery involved with predestination and responsibility but we often see them both in the same verse, like in Acts 2:23: ***“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”*** As we established this past summer, *God is supremely sovereign, and we are responsible for our response to Him.*

If we *want to be bold and not fold* when hard times come, we must be proactive by finding support from others, by focusing on the sovereignty of God and by fortifying ourselves with Scripture.

We're also called to be prayerful by making three requests of God.

Be Prayerful

1. Ask God to see your situation. We see this in verse 29: *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats...”* They're simply asking God to pay attention to what is being done to them and then they leave the matter with Him.

These persecuted people are simply affirming the truth God sees and knows everything. God invites us to call Him by name and one of those names in Hebrew is *El Roi*, the God who sees. Exodus 2:25 says, *“God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”* Another translation puts it like this: *“So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.”*

2. Ask God to help you speak boldly. It's incredible that in the midst of so much opposition, these believers asked for boldness, not for their problems to go away. They asked for power, not protection. Look at the second half of verse 29: *“...and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”* Notice they see themselves as *“servants”* before a Sovereign God. This is actually the word for *“bond slave.”* Slaves were expected to render absolute submission and unconditional obedience to their masters. These servants are literally asking something like this: *“Grant us now with all boldness to go on speaking.”*

3. Ask God to do the miraculous. Check out their expectancy in verse 30: *“While you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”* These miracles authenticated the message of the gospel and gave credibility to the Christians. It showed people that God's power and presence was real and relevant.

A week ago I talked to someone who asked me if I believed in signs. I asked what she meant to see if she would open up. She explained she's been struggling and found herself at Edgewood as part of a job assignment. Then she told me her mom had been encouraging her to find a church and she didn't know how to do that. With tears in her eyes, she told me she thinks it's a sign from God for her to come to church. I heartily agreed and hope she comes again.

Does God still heal today? Absolutely. Does He still send signs and work His wonders? All the time. So, here's a question. What has God been using to get your attention? Is there a sign or situation that is propelling you to take your next step?

We need to pray and ask God to do the miraculous in our midst today. Would you join me in asking God to send a spiritual awakening to Edgewood? I've been praying Psalm 85:6 for us: ***“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”***

Be bold and don't fold when hard times come.

Be Prepared

After being proactive and prayerful, be prepared for what God will do.

1. God will shake things up. I'm not sure these followers were fully prepared for what happened next in verse 31: ***“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken...”*** The word for ***“shaken”*** means, ***“unexpected rocking, waving, and tottering.”*** Something similar happened in response to Paul and Silas singing praises when they were in prison in Acts 16:26: ***“And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.”***

Shaking in the Scriptures demonstrates God's presence with His people. Before God gave the 10 Commandments, we read in Exodus 19:18: ***“Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.”*** When God wanted to use Isaiah the prophet, He first shook him up according to Isaiah 6:4: ***“And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.”***

On a personal level, sometimes God shakes us up in order to get our attention, doesn't He? Is He shaking you today? If you're not saved yet, He's shaking you until you come to faith in Him. If you're saved but drifting, He could be rocking you right now so you surrender to Him.

2. God will fill us with the Holy Spirit. As we learned last weekend, we're commanded to be filled with the Spirit. In verse 31 we see that God is the One

who does the filling: “...*and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Notice it was not just some of them but “*all*” of them. This is the third time for Peter. The word “*filled*” means, “*to make full, to be complete.*”

I long for God to do the same among the people of Edgewood. Could you imagine what God could do in and through us, if each and every one of us was fully filled with the Holy Spirit and totally surrendered to Him? Our church would be different, and our community would be as well.

3. God will give us boldness. It’s fascinating how the filling of the Holy Spirit is often linked to bold gospel witnessing. Look at the last phrase of verse 31: “...*and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*” The word “*boldness*” means the ability to speak freely and frankly. It is in the imperfect tense, meaning it happened “*over and over, again and again.*” Here’s a short survey of how God answered this prayer for boldness in the Book of Acts:

- Acts 9:27 tells us Barnabas vouched for Paul’s conversion, pointing out “*how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.*”
- Acts 13:46: “*And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly...*”
- Acts 14:3: “*So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord...*”
- Acts 19:8: “*And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*”
- Acts 26:26: “*For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly...*”
- Acts 28:31 is the very last verse in Acts: “*Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*”

Are you a bold believer? Or are you an undercover Christian? In his book, “The Embarrassed Believer,” Hugh Hewitt contends most Christians do not talk about their faith or church. They don’t have Bibles on the corner of their desks and never engage others in spiritual conversations: “*Too many of us are embarrassed, silent, secret agents for God...Christians in America trying to save the lost, comfort the suffering...and bring joy to the despairing will not make a significant and lasting impact unless they do so openly and without apology as Christians.*”

Tony Evans adds, “*We have too many ‘secret agent’ Christians. Everybody else is coming out of the closet. We might as well come out, too.*”

More than ever we need believers who are bold. Do your classmates know you are a Christian? Do your co-workers know you worship Jesus? Do your neighbors know that you know Jesus through the new birth?

Brothers and sisters, you are my people! *Be bold and don't fold when hard times come.*

- Let's be proactive by finding support from others, by focusing on the sovereignty of God, and fortifying ourselves with Scripture.
- Let's be prayerful by asking God to see our situation, by asking Him to help us speak boldly and to do the miraculous.
- Let's be prepared for God to shake things up, to fill us with the Holy Spirit and to grant us boldness.

While it's good to celebrate what God is doing, we also need to calibrate our commitment to make sure we're doing what God wants us to do. Last weekend we closed by making seven resolutions. Today I want us to end with a declaration called, "The Fellowship of the Unashamed."

I'm going to read it and when I'm finished, I will ask you to raise your hand if you're ready to say, "*I'm in!*"

"I'm a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I'm done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity.

I don't have to be right, or first, or tops, or recognized, or praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power. My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear. I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He does come for His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear!"

If you're in, would you raise your hand?

New Members at 9

Mike and Audry Botts
Dave and Pam Leek