

BOLDNESS IN PREACHING

Acts 4:13-22

I. The Enduement by the Holy Spirit.

The boldness which is mentioned here was Holy Spirit boldness. It came as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Verse 8. Formerly, Peter was a very timid man. On the very eve of the crucifixion, he had cowardly denied his Lord three times. The Holy Spirit is the explanation of the difference in his life before and after Pentecost. No bolder exponent of the gospel ever lived than that former coward. We, too, need this same sort of boldness.

II. The Example of It.

Those who heard Peter saw the effect of that filling of the Spirit in the words that poured from his lips--words the like of which they had never heard before. From his declarations in verses 9-12, we see that there is no hint even that he was abashed by their appearance or their authority.

III. The Effect of It.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13.

The surprising element in the conduct of those early Christians was their unexpected boldness as they faced the rulers and accusers. It was the last thing to be expected from such unlearned men. It was so surprising that it sent a tremor of fear through the hearts of the rulers.

They traced their wisdom and courage to its rightful and logical source--Jesus Christ. The members of the Sanhedrin took knowledge of the fact that Peter and John had been with Jesus, and they had caught the spirit of Jesus. The disciples seemed to possess the same boldness which Jesus had displayed.

The members of the Sanhedrin had seen to it that one man was put to death, and now behold there are two to carry on the task. They were amazed that such a miracle should take place before their very eyes. They were profoundly impressed with what they saw in the lives of those champions of the cross. But that was not all. The most powerful argument for Christianity in that day was the presence of a healed man, standing with the disciples. "And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." Acts 4:14. It was not necessary for him to utter a word. The facts of Christianity are the hope of its progress. It does not glory in its beautiful ritualisms, nor in its magnificent temples; but it does glory in the results it produces in the lives of men. The army of souls that have been remade in Christ is a rich heritage indeed. The changed lives of drunkards who have been made sober, and thieves who have been made honest.

This man who had been healed was an unwavering witness. He stood with them, although he could have run away like some of our church members. Their very absence hurts the cause of Christ. He gave his enthusiasm for Christ, leaping, shouting, and praising God. Why not? He had enough to make him enthusiastic. The devil tries to cool our ardor by saying it is all right to get enthusiastic about other things, but not about religion.

IV. The End of It. Verse 15 ff.

Peter and John were commanded to go aside while the council met in secret. When Peter and John and the healed man were led out to an ante-room, for the purpose of allowing the authorities to discuss their case behind closed door, the scene would have been laughable if it had not been so sad. There was a crowd of men up against a fact. They said, "We cannot deny it," it is "indeed a notable miracle," and it "is manifest to all Jerusalem." Their difficulty was that they did not want it to be a fact. So they said "What shall we do to these men?", not "what shall we do with the facts?" but "how shall we escape dealing fairly with them?" Think of it! There you see not only malice, but also cowardice.

In secret conclave they arrived at a course of action, so they resolved to see it through with as much dignity as they were capable of gathering, and that was not much. They had not learned that red-tape can never be a substitute for rectitude. So Peter and John and the healed man were marched in again. Perhaps they had been having a prayer meeting in the ante-room. With the suspense over, they received the solemn charge that henceforth they were not to speak to any man in the name of Christ. But the council might as well have told the sun not to shine, and the tides not to move, and the winds not to blow, as to tell these men not to talk about Jesus.

The answer of the apostles was magnificent. In a manly, heroic, and Christlike manner they answered, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." "Whether it be right" should always be our first consideration. Right is one of the words we ought to restore to its proper place in our thinking, and what it means to its rightful place in our practice.

"UNITED WE STAND; DIVIDED WE FALL"

Acts 4:23-37

In this part of the chapter we have an excellent example of united effort. The disciples were united. Upon being released, the apostles went forthwith to the Christian assembly and there gave a detailed report of all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

I. They were united in Prayer. Acts 4:23-30.

"And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." This verse magnifies the greatness of God, rather than the badness of men. Wishing to get their minds away from men, they opened the door toward heaven--the window of prayer. They unitedly reminded God of His Almightyness, being the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. It is always well for a Christian to put God between him and his temptations or troubles. When circumstances were the darkest, the disciples lifted their eyes to the God of the hills, from whence cometh their help, and our help.

"They lifted up their voice to God with one accord." They were perfectly united, there being no discordant note among them. If "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," consider how much more effectual the prayer of an entire group is certain to be. What we cannot always obtain from God, individually, we can invariably get from Him, collectively. "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matthew 18:19-20.

Those early disciples believed firmly in the sovereignty of God. "To do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." This constituted the very heart of their prayer. They began their petition by reminding God of His greatness, and now they follow that by reminding Him of His goodness. He will not allow His enemies to go beyond a certain point. It was a case of "thus far shalt thou go and no farther." They concluded their prayer with these words "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." Verses 29-30.

They prayed that miracles might be done, in order that people might come and listen. It was through the miraculous healing of the lame man that the crowds were brought to hear Peter, and five thousand men were saved in a single service.

II. They were united in Power.

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

"The place was shaken where they were assembled"---a visible demonstration of divine favor, and a harbinger of great things to come. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit," which was the greatest possible proof of power. United prayer produces united power.

"And they spake the word of God with boldness." God gave them the fullness of the Spirit, not to make them happy, but rather to make them helpful. Some who seek the fullness of the Spirit are unsuccessful in their attempt because they want something for self instead of for the Saviour and society. The disciples wanted the fullness of the Spirit in order that God might be glorified, and that souls might be saved.

III. They were united in Purpose.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Acts 4:32a

IV. They were united in Provision.

"Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." Negatively, no one was seeking anything for himself. Positively, everyone was delighted to share what he had with others less fortunate.

CONCLUSION

1. Prayer produces power. Verse 31a.
2. Power produces pungent preaching. Verse 31b.
3. Preaching produces philanthropy. Verse 32a.
4. Philanthropy produces prosperity. Verse 32b-37.
5. Prosperity produces praise.