

Acts 4:1-22

Outward Church: Outward Courage

Jonathan M. Romig

John and **David** are out back working on the **AC Unit**. John is a believer and begins to ask David, “Do you go to church?” David explains that he used to go to mass but hasn’t been in years. They talk a little bit about the differences between Catholicism and John’s church, but the details stay high-level. Catholics have priests. Protestants have pastors. Catholics baptize babies. John’s church doesn’t. They don’t talk about any real theological differences. They don’t speak of sin or grace. As they wrap up fixing the AC, David says, “It’s not really what you believe that matters; just that you have faith.” John knows that’s not right, but he doesn’t say anything, maybe because he **doesn’t** want to **offend** or he doesn’t know what to say.

Samantha and **Jessie** just finished their **Zumba** class. Samantha, a recent believer, invited Jessie to grab coffee with her after class. They’re on their way to Dunkin Donuts when Jessie starts telling Samantha how difficult her marriage is right now. Samantha listens and tries to offer words of **encouragement**. She knows what she really needs is **Jesus** but something inside her **worries** their **relationship** will end before it ever begins if she brings up **religion**. So she compromises, she says, “I’ll pray for you.” Jessie seems to mean it when she says “thank you.” Their conversation turns to lighter topics. Samantha wonders if she should have said more. Instead of bringing it back up she prays, like she said, and asks the Spirit for another try.

Maybe you can **relate** to one of these stories. Maybe it’s not so different than something you’ve experienced. The Lord gives us an **opportunity** to talk about Jesus and we **miss** it. Maybe you feel **guilty**, a **burden** for your friend, coworker, or family member that needs Jesus. Or maybe you feel **fine** but you’re pretty sure your **pastor** wants you to feel guilty. **Why don’t we** share the gospel? Or if we do, what are the **biggest obstacles** to overcome? **Apathy? Lack of opportunity? Fear of rejection?**

In Acts we find two men who have the **courage** to **share the gospel** in the face of fear. They’ve just **healed** a man at the **temple gate**. He was crippled and couldn’t walk for 40 years, but through faith in Jesus they perform a **miracle**. They **heal him** and that’s when the **trouble starts**. He get’s up and goes **running** into the **temple courts shouting** and **jumping** and **praising God** (Acts 3:8). That attracts a large crowd who they tell about **Jesus** and his **resurrection** from the **dead**. That large crowd attracts the **priests**, and the **captain** of the **temple guard**, the **Sadducees**, and others who don’t like what they see (Acts 4:1, 8). They are “greatly **disturbed**.” They are deeply **annoyed**, even **vexed**, and so they “**seize**” them and throw them in jail (v3).

How do you think Peter and John **feel**? There are two options. They feel...

A. Fear of man -> inward fear

They can let their **fears** and **anxieties** of what **people might do** to them **define** them, which **produces** an **inward-focused** fear of “what might happen to me.” Or they can feel...

B. Fear of God -> outward courage

A **healthy** fear of who God is, a **respect** and **awe** for him, produces **outward courage** that helps us focus on **God**, his **will**, and the **needs of others** more than **ourselves**.

Proverbs 1:7 (NIV)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

As **we** think about **evangelism** like Peter and John we don't need to be afraid but to obey God. When those in power tell them to stop evangelizing it doesn't go well.

Acts 4:18-20 (NIV) 18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

They are so focused on God and telling people about him (outward courage) that they're not afraid, or if they are, their courage overcomes their fear.

Today I want us to look at **their fears** and **our own**—and the **hope** we have that **overcomes** our fears. I have **four fears** and **hopes** and **one big idea**. The first fear and hope are...

1. Fear of harm / Hope in the resurrection.

Look back at verse one. The temple had a **police force** called the "**temple guard**" that may have been made up of **priests themselves** (v1). So you have a group of **highly trained**, highly **skilled**, probably very **zealous**, men coming to **arrest** you and throw you in **prison**. During the summers in my **hometown** of **Estes Park CO** the police force hired **rent-a-cops** during **tourist** season. These are no rent-a-cops.

To top it off **Caiaphas** and **Annas** are there (v6), the current and past **high priests** who got Jesus **executed** (John 18:13, 24). Peter even says to them that Jesus is the one "whom you crucified" (v10). This isn't **corporate guilt**. They **literally** killed him. That would have given me **pause**. If someone murdered my **seminary professor** and started **threatening** me for being a pastor, I'd think twice (v21).

Now I want to **stop** and **ask**, "Have any of us been **physically threatened** for sharing Christ?" Like if in our **opening story** David turns to John and says, "You better stop telling me about Jesus or I'll punch you in the nose!" For most of us that hasn't happened. The harm we experience is more **mental** or **emotional**—we feel we might be **ostracized**. But even then, are we **actually excluded**, or is it just the **fear of exclusion**? Unless we move to a **different country**, we're **probably not** going to be thrown in **jail** for sharing Jesus.

Perception is reality. So we need to **change** our perception. We need to think like Peter and John. They seemed to be so focused on the **resurrection** of **Jesus** and **filled** with the Spirit **that** it **swallows up** their fears. They speak of the resurrection **three** times—twice to the crowds and once to the leaders.¹ Even if they're killed, Jesus will raise them up. *Hope in the resurrection overcomes fear of harm*. The second fear...

2. Fear of man's authority / Hope in Christ's authority.

Peter and John displease the priests and temple guard and the "**rulers**" (v5). In Jerusalem, the political, religious, and governmental all mix together. It's like if our **church building** was also **town hall**. Acts goes out of its ways to tell us those "**in charge**" **politically** were there, the "**rulers**." Then Peter and John are brought before the **Sanhedrin**, a **ruling council** made up of **70 powerful Sadducees** and **Pharisees** and **presided** over by the **high priest**. They couldn't condemn people to **death** (John 18:31) but they could send them to **Pilate** for **execution**, just like they did **Jesus** (Mark 14:55-56, 15:1).

I reviewed a chapter of the book *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever this week. The chapter was called "Why *Don't* We Evangelize?" **Excuse #2** is "*Evangelism is illegal*." That's true in some countries that are "atheistic or Muslim, secular or even 'Christian' (in name)." Maybe some of us work for the **government** or are a **teacher** or your job won't **allow it**. We should look for **legal opportunities**. **Christ's command** to "**go and make disciples**" (Matt 28:18-20) **supersedes** all earthly laws and regulations.

When we're afraid of earthly authorities, let's remember Christ and **his authority**. He's **seated** on the **throne ruling** and **reigning**. He's in charge. When the rulers and others question why the crippled man is healed, Peter says this addressing those in charge:

Acts 4:10-11 (NIV) 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: 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. 11 Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”

Peter quotes Psalm 118:22. Verses 19-29 of this Psalm speaks of **worshippers** going up to the **temple**.² The **cornerstone** was the **first stone** the **builders** put down to determine the **direction** of the temple, its **length**, and the **width** of its **walls**. Scripture identifies Jesus as the temple of God (John 2:19-21), but believers are also called the temple (1 Cor 3:16). That means Jesus is the **first stone** of a **new temple** and we are the **stones** built on him (1 Pet 2:5). They've **rejected** the one who is laying the **foundation** for a **new, eternal, temple**. They've **turned their back** on **God's temple** by **rejecting Jesus**.

When we feel fearful, let's remember who is **really in control**, **Jesus**. Acts 4 has really **convicted** me that we need to all be doing **personal evangelism**. It's not just my job as the **pastor** to do it or **Bernie's** job because he's **really gifted**. Jesus calls us **each** to tell non-believers about him. So my challenge for you is to pray that the Lord gives you **opportunities** to share **this week**. I got to share Jesus several times this week and I think it's because it was **on my heart**. I was asking the **Spirit** for opportunities. One woman at my gym mentioned **her church** so I asked her where she went to church and that started a whole **conversation**. It played out almost exactly like the **intro** to my sermon, but Jesus showed up and gave me the courage I needed. *Hope in Christ's authority overcomes fear of man's authority*. The third fear and hope is...

3. Fear of loss / Hope in lives saved.

The **elders** were the “**lay leaders**” in Jerusalem. They weren't priests, but they were **men** in power, probably **business owners** or **respected citizens**. I think it's fair to say that if Peter and John crossed the elders of Jerusalem they could kiss their **money**, **relationships**, and **security** goodbye.

That's a **big question**, isn't it? What might I **lose** from telling this friend or loved one about Jesus? Their **friendship**? Perhaps my **job**? **Fear of loss** is huge. But have we also thought about what we might **gain**? A **brother** or **sister in Christ**? Yes, the **leaders** responded **poorly**, those who had **power to lose** if the people started believing in Jesus. But what about the people themselves?

Acts 4:4 (NIV) But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

In **Acts 3:41** **3,000** come to Christ. Now the number **grows** to **5,000** men, not including women and children. *Hope in lives saved overcomes fear of loss*.

I recently read a book on recent converts in Asia. The book asked:

“How did you get to know about Christianity for the first time?” ...Not a single one of them reported that they had done so through the media or reading the Bible. Nor were preachers of much impact—only 3 percent [...] gave that as the source of their initial awareness. Instead, 90 percent had their initial contact with Christianity through interpersonal ties: through acquaintances, family members, or neighbors. - *A Star in the East* (p. 105)

If we want to get past fear of loss, we need to focus on the **lives Christ can save through us**, and invite. **If you never try, you'll never know.** How many of us have never tried because of fear, but really, that's the best reason to try. We want to see them **repent** of their sins and **come to Christ** so that one day we **won't lose them**, so that we'll get to spend all eternity with them. *Hope in lives saved overcomes fear of loss.*

4. Fear of intellect / Hope in the Spirit.

There's one especially encouraging verse, verse 13.

Acts 4:13 (NIV) 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.

No Peter and John **weren't dumb**. They could likely **speak** if not **write** in **multiple languages, Greek and Aramaic**. But they also **weren't educated like** the **"teachers of the law"**—the **scribes**. By all outward appearances, they've just come from wandering in the countryside for three years, but actually they were with a Rabbi, Jesus, living with him, learning from him, watching him, hearing his teachings.

This means you don't need to go to **Bible school** to tell others about Jesus. You don't need a **Master of Divinity** or **Theology** or a **Bible certificate**. You just need to **sit** at **Jesus' feet** by growing in your **church family**, studying the **Scriptures**, **praying**, and following the **leading** of the **Holy Spirit**. Jesus says:

Luke 12:11-12 (NIV) 11 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

It's good to engage the mind as part of our Christian faith. We need to think **critically** about **what we believe** and **why we believe it**. I also believe it can be good to **plan** to have **conversations** with others about Jesus, especially if we never do it otherwise. But we also need to **hope** in the **Holy Spirit** and what he can do. *Hope in the Spirit overcomes fear of intellect.*

So how can we **overcome** our **fear** of **sharing** the **gospel**? 1) *Hope in the resurrection overcomes fear of harm.* 2) *Hope in Christ's authority overcomes fear of man's authority.* 3) *Hope in lives saved overcomes fear of loss.* 4) *Hope in the Spirit overcomes fear of intellect.* These four come together for one **big idea**:

Faith in Jesus can transform inward fear into outward courage.

When we have received **salvation** from our sins through faith in Jesus Christ **he begins to transform** us from fearing man to fearing God. **Jesus** begins to **replace** our fears with a **heart of courage**. Peter says:

Acts 4:12 (NIV) 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."

It's really hard to **say** that today, "**Jesus is the only way**" but it's true. Have you **told anyone** that **recently**? We're **not responsible** for whether **they believe** or not, but if we don't tell them **who will**? Their **hearts** aren't going to tell them. Our hearts are **deceptive** above all things (Jer 17:9). *Faith in Jesus can transform inward fear into outward courage.*

I want to end with the story from **Mark Dever's** book, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* (p. 13-15).

John Harper was born in a Christian home in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1872. When he was about fourteen years old, he became a Christian himself, and from that time on, he began to tell others

about Christ. At seventeen years of age, he began to preach, going down the streets of his village and pouring out his soul in passionate pleading for me to be reconciled to God.

[Several years later he was hired to do evangelism full-time and he soon started a church.]

This church, which he began with just twenty-five members, numbered over five hundred by the time he left thirteen years later. [...] (Evangelism works!)

In fact, he was such a zealous evangelist that the Moody Church in Chicago asked him to come over to America for a series of meetings. He did, and they went well. A few years later, Moody Church asked him if he would come back again. And so it was that Harper boarded a ship one day with a second-class ticket at Southampton, England, for the voyage to America.

Harper's wife had died just a few years before, and he had with him his only child, Nana, age six. [Nana] remembered being woken up by her father a few nights into their journey. It was about midnight, and he said the ship they were on had struck an iceberg. Harper told Nana that another ship was just about there to rescue them, but, as a precaution, he was going to put her in a lifeboat with an older cousin, who had accompanied them. As for Harper, he would wait until the other ship arrived.

The rest of the story is a tragedy well known. Little Nana and her cousin were saved. But the ship they were on was the *Titanic*. The only way we know what happened to John Harper after is because, in a prayer meeting in Hamilton Ontario, some months later, a young Scotsman stood up in tears and told the extraordinary story of how he was converted. He explained that he had been on the *Titanic* the night it struck the iceberg. He had clung to a piece of floating debris in the freezing waters. "Suddenly," he said, "a wave brought a man near, John Harper. He, too, was holding a piece of wreckage.

"He called out, 'Man, are you saved?'

"No, I am not,' I replied.

"He shouted back, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

"The waves bore [Harper] away, but a little later, he was washed back beside me again. 'Are you saved now?' he called out.

"No,' I answered. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

"Then losing his hold on the wood, [Harper] sank. And there, alone in the night with two miles of water under me, I trusted Christ as my savior. I am John Harper's last convert."³

Faith in Jesus can transform inward fear into outward courage. Don't wait for the boat to sink to tell your coworker in the next cube over about Jesus. Pray that Jesus would give you strength. Believe he will. Then go and share. Faith in Jesus can transform inward fear into outward courage.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions:

1. How often do you share the gospel with people who don't yet know Jesus?

2. What are some of the reasons you don't evangelize or share the gospel? Is it fear that holds you back? Apathy? Time? Some other thing?
3. What's the difference between the fear of man and the fear of God? How might one fear push us inside ourselves and the other draw us out and into our world?
4. Have you ever experienced a threat for sharing about Jesus? How did you overcome it? How does the resurrection give us hope in the face of threats and opposition?
5. How does Christ's ascension and being seated on the throne give us hope and courage to share the gospel? What does it mean for him to reign supreme in all things?
6. What do you fear you will lose by sharing the gospel? What might we actually lose if we don't share the gospel? We know God is sovereign, but we also are called to evangelize and make disciples.
7. How can the mind hinder and/or help us in our evangelism? Apologetics and testimony are both different than actually sharing the gospel. How can they help and sometimes get in the way of gospel evangelism?
8. Can we be saved by anyone but Christ? How about our friends? Can they be saved by anyone but Jesus?
9. How does salvation through faith in Christ Jesus help us overcome our fears and have courage to share?
10. What's one step you want to take this week to go and share the gospel with a friend, coworker, family-member, or stranger? Close by praying for each other.

¹ Acts 3:15, 4:2, 10.

² NIV Zondervan Study Bible. Page 1145. Psalm 118 footnote.

³ Mark Dever is quoting: Moody Adams *The Titanic's Last Hero: Story About John Harper* (Columbia, SC: Olive Press, 1997), 24-25.