

Acts 4:1-31 - Godoy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 May 2026

Preacher: Dan Godoy

[0:00] Good morning. It is a joy to greet you all in the name of our risen Lord Jesus today.! And a special greeting to those visiting with us.

I know we have lots of activities going on at the college this weekend with graduation. So if you're visiting, welcome today. And a special greeting also to the mothers on Mother's Day.

Grace and peace to you. If you have a mother, you should find a way to honor your mother today. And a special greeting to my own mother. Mom, it's great to have you here. Grace and peace to you.

That's what happens when you visit your son at his church on Mother's Day. When he's preaching, he might get called out. Hope that's okay. Well, we're continuing our 33-week series in the book of Acts.

Getting our Acts together. As Daniel Bear said. So let me ask you to pray with me once more as we turn to Acts chapter 4. Amen. Sovereign Lord, you have accomplished through your son, Jesus Christ, all that your hand and your plan has predestined to take place in our world.

[1:07] Lord, you have ordained this moment where your word is open and your spirit is moving. And so, Lord, look upon this moment. Grant me boldness by the power of your spirit to proclaim your word and give us ears to hear, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy. Have you heard that expression? No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy. This is used in business, in sports, in, I suppose, in the military. It's a principle that tries to express the fact that no matter how good your plan is or your tactics or your strategy, when the fighting breaks out, the success of the mission depends on something more.

Heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson famously paraphrased it this way. He said, everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. What would happen to the early Christian movement when it took its first punch in the mouth, if we can say it that way?

So far in the book of Acts, it seems like everything is going according to plan. God's kingdom mission is advancing unopposed. The sun is enthroned and ascended.

[2:26] The Holy Spirit has come and fallen on the believers at Pentecost. The believers, we've watched them living this faithful, ordinary life together. And then the lame man is healed and the gospel is proclaimed in the public square.

And it seems like everything is advancing according to plan. But what happens when the people in charge start turning the screws and try to suppress this movement?

Will the church resort to tactics? Let's get the apostles and hide them away by night, hide them away from their enemies. There's nothing wrong with that. Just wait till Acts chapter 23 later in our sermon series.

The apostles will do that. But that's not what God's kingdom plan depends on. Will the apostles report resort to politics? Let's use politics and fight for our rights.

Nothing wrong with that. Wait till Acts chapter 16. The apostles do that too. But it's not what God's kingdom plan depends on. In our text this morning, Luke, as he continues this persuasive history of the early church, the book of Acts, he wants to make an argument here in chapter 4 to persuade us, the reader, that the advance of God's kingdom mission does not depend on human schemes, but it depends on the Holy Spirit poured out on his church to give them boldness to continue proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[3:54] We saw hints of this in chapter 1 at verse 8, when Luke remembers the words of Jesus to the disciples, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

You remember this from chapter 1. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And that theme will continue all through the book of Acts. And here in chapter 4, we see it developed in full in this short story.

The story this morning in Acts chapter 4 is a narrative, and it has three acts in the book of Acts. Three acts in the book of Acts. In our Sunday school class this morning, we also had three acts. So there's lots of acts going on. But three acts, the arrest, the council trial, and the prayer meeting. It divides neatly into those three parts. And so I'm going to walk through those parts. But as I do that, I want you to keep this starting question centered in your mind. How will God's kingdom plan advance when the opposition hits?

[4:58] This story is a persuasive answer to that question. Now, if you were here last week, you'll remember chapter 3. And chapter 3 sort of ends in the middle of a scene.

So we're actually in the middle of a story. So let's rebuild the context, set the scene of where we are as we come to chapter 4. Peter and John, these apostles, had been going to the Jewish temple to go to pray with the Jewish community in chapter 3.

They came across this man who for 40 years, his whole life, had been unable to walk, sitting at the city gate, begging at the temple gate. And in the name of Jesus, and by faith in the name of Jesus, the man stood up and walked and leapt.

And if you were there, you would have been astonished, just like the crowd. And so they turned to Peter, and Peter takes the opportunity to launch into a speech.

And you remember this if you were here last week. Peter goes on preaching and proclaiming this Christ-centered, gospel-shaped message to everybody who saw this amazing miracle.

[5:59] Calling for repentance, proclaiming salvation, offering the grace of God. It's this amazing, powerful moment. And if you or I were writing the movie script of this scene, the next thing that you or I might write is the men running home to get their wives and their children and bring them back to hear Peter speaking and thousands of households hearing and believing and being baptized and joining the early Christian movement, just like happened on the day of Pentecost.

But that's not what happens here. Because on this day, the enemies of Christ appear in opposition to this early church movement.

And that's where we begin as we come to Acts chapter 4. The arrest of the apostles in verses 1 through 4. I'll read the first three verses.

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching to people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening. Right away, Luke, the author, wants us to feel the suddenness of the scene change.

[7:13] While they were speaking, Peter's in the middle of this speech and they're not going to wait for him to finish. They just show up and they're going to shut it down. It says in verse 1 at the end, Ed, they came upon them.

This is a phrase that Luke uses a few times in the book of Acts when the people in charge show up and change the plot. Suddenly. And their action is as sudden as their appearance.

They arrested them, put them in custody. They're not going to debate it. Just put them in jail. We'll deal with it tomorrow. They show up decisively, swiftly to shut it down. And Luke wants us to feel that suddenness.

He also wants us to feel the power of the opposition that appears. Look who shows up. The priests. These are the guys in charge of the temple in that day.

The descendants of Levi and Aaron. It's their job in the temple to uphold the purity of the temple. To maintain the rituals of the place.

[8:11] They come with all the prestige of religious religious position. Who else comes? The captain of the temple. This is the muscle.

Okay. This is the bouncer in the back with some of his boys. These are the guys who in Luke 22 arrested Jesus in the garden. These are the ones who in Acts chapter 5 will again arrest the apostles and throw them in jail.

These are the guys with the guns and the swords I suppose in that day. Luke wants us to feel the power of the armed guard. And who else?

The Sadducees. Let's talk about the Sadducees for a moment because if in the gospels you remember the Pharisees were the key opponents of Jesus in the book of Acts in the early church in Jerusalem the Sadducees are the key opponents of the early church.

So we're going to see these guys a lot over the next few weeks. Who are they? The Sadducees were a key faction in the ruling class in Jerusalem at this time.

[9:16] There was a lot of overlap between the party of the Sadducees and the high priestly families. Okay, clans that traced their lineage back to Zadok the high priest in Solomon's time and they claimed legitimacy because he was their ancestor.

A lot of overlap between the Sadducees and these high priestly families. And the Sadducees also had a lot of connections to Herod the king. Tight political connections and through Herod to the Roman government.

And here's the interesting thing. The political influence and power of the Sadducees had a lot to do with their control of the Jewish temple at this time.

Their authority derived from their control of the temple and that temple from the Romans perspective was a tool of control of the people of Israel. Here's the point.

If anyone stood to lose from the weakening of the control of the Jewish temple it was these guys. If the hearts of the people of Israel turned away from the Jewish temple leadership and turned toward a crucified and supposedly resurrected Messiah who said that his body was the temple these guys were the biggest losers.

[10:34] the point is they are a powerful but fragile political regime. The gospel of Jesus is a threat to their power and they know it and they're coming to shut it down.

Now you might be thinking isn't there a theological question here about the resurrection because you're reading verse 2 and you see the Sadducees are greatly annoyed because they're teaching the people proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Isn't this really about the resurrection? And you were here on Easter and you remember Tad was preaching about the resurrection and said that in Jesus' day there was this debate among the Jews about whether the resurrection was really a thing.

And the Sadducees said no it's not a thing. So isn't this really a theological debate? Yes and no. It's true the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection but it's also true that the resurrection of Jesus was an overtly political message in this time.

It threatened the Sadducees and so they needed to shut it down. So they come with speed with power to shut down this movement.

[11:44] Luke wants us to understand that right from the start. Back to our starting question how will God's kingdom mission advance when the opposition hits? Luke hints at the answer in verse 4 but many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men came to about 5,000.

You can arrest the leaders of this movement. You can try to shut it down from the top but the essence of this movement is not the people. It is a message.

A message so good that it must be passed on as the apostles are doing. Before we move on let's just apply this and observe how this is characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is not a thing you can shut down by shutting down its leaders but the gospel is a message spoken and heard it implants in the hearts of believers it bears fruit it sprouts new life and that's how God's kingdom moves forward.

Jesus tells a parable in Mark's gospel that I love it's a very short parable and it says Jesus is teaching he says the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground he sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows he knows not how Peter's in prison having proclaimed this gospel message in the public square he doesn't see that 5,000 men come to faith that day he doesn't know it but the word of God is going forward even when the opposition shuts down the leadership this should be an encouragement to us in our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ to my fellow ministers of the gospel here at Holy Covenant Church this is an encouragement to us as we preach the word that it doesn't depend on us but we are like sowers of seeds scattered on the ground and it sprouts and grows we know not how no matter how weak and frail we feel here and it's an example to all of you wherever you may be proclaimers of the word of God at home at work in the public square in the church

[13:55] God's word goes forth regardless of the leaders well that scene closes out and the second scene the second act begins the council trial this is verse 5 through 22 really the longest

part of our text this morning and in this scene what I want you to see is that the people in power now apply maximum pressure to try to shut down this movement read verses 5 through 7 on the next day the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all who were of the high priestly family and when they had set them in the midst they inquired by what power or by what name did you do this okay I want you to imagine or remember the highest pressure public speaking situation you've ever been in okay maybe it's a pitch to a client maybe a trial arguments in the courtroom students maybe a presentation in class maybe a speech at a wedding okay picture a high pressure moment like that all the people in the room are looking at you they all seem so important in that moment the stakes feel so high the anxiety is rising in your chest

Luke wants us to feel that pressure as this scene opens up all the important people are there Annas Caiaphas John Alexander Caiaphas scholars believe was the official high priest on paper at this time the guy approved by Roman government to rule and to lead in the temple Annas was his father-in-law a former high priest Luke calls him the high priest he was probably the real power in Jerusalem the guy behind the scenes kind of the godfather of Jerusalem leadership John was Caiaphas' son and the man who would become high priest a few years later in AD 36 Alexander is unknown to scholars but he was apparently well known to the original readers of this text let the reader understand all of the most important people in Jerusalem leadership are here all of this power is concentrated on these apostles in this moment we feel the pressure the stakes couldn't be higher this is probably a formal gathering a formal session of the

Sanhedrin this 70 member ruling council of Jerusalem leadership at this time this is Congress and the Supreme Court and the President all at once all in one place the stakes can't be higher there is no higher court in Jerusalem contemporary sources tell us that at these Sanhedrin meetings the council would array themselves in a semicircle around the accused imagine if we took all the all the chairs in this room kind of move them out into a semicircle around me and put me in the middle and bound me up and you all sit there sternly staring at me on trial the very geometry of the situation is for maximum pressure on the apostles and so they set Peter and John and the lame man there in the middle of this semicircle and they ask this question by what power or by what name did you do this notice that it's not really a theological question they're not curious by what power or by what name they know the name of Jesus this is a question about power this is a question about legitimacy about authority it's a question designed for maximum pressure and it's a question that assumes its own answer who gave them authority to preach in the temple well obviously nobody because all the people who could have given them authority are sitting in the room asking them who gave them authority there is no answer to this question it's a question that assumes its own answer it looks like the apostles are cornered it looks like the kingdom of God movement has its backs its back to the ropes back to our starting question how will

God's kingdom mission advance when the opposition hits well Peter responds and his defense flips this entire scene on its head I'll read this speech and then make a few comments about it Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them rulers of the people and elders if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man by what means this man has been healed 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 crucified whom God raised from the dead by him this man is standing well before you this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone 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 an amazing speech

Peter returns maximum pressure with maximum boldness let me point out four things from this speech number one Peter's boldness comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit there in verse 8 Peter filled with the Holy Spirit do you remember the last time Peter was anywhere near the Sanhedrin when they were considering the name of Jesus in the Gospels when Jesus was on trial and where was Peter out in the courtyard keeping his distance warming his hands by the fire denying that he even knew his Lord and now here Peter is bold as a lion and what's the difference the filling of the Holy Spirit of his resurrected Lord Peter's boldness comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit number two Peter declares that his legitimacy is in the name of Jesus the leaders asked a question of which they thought there was no legitimate answer

[20:27] Peter gives an answer that they cannot question Peter says you want to know by what power or by what name we do these things the answer is standing right here next to us the lame

man leaps he's a living picture of the salvation of God of the power of the name of Jesus what further credentials could you need Peter declares his legitimacy is the name of Jesus number three Peter rebukes the religious leaders blindness when Peter talks about a stone and the builders and the cornerstone in verse 11 he knows exactly what he's doing and the leaders know it too Peter is alluding to almost quoting from Psalm 118 and you know this Psalm we used words from it at the very beginning of our service in the call to worship if you were at men's prayer yesterday we read Psalm 118 this is the reason why we read

Psalm 118 on Palm Sunday it's a song about the salvation of God and it's a song about how the high and mighty will reject the salvation of God and Peter is quoting that Psalm Peter remembers that the Jews a few weeks earlier were singing this song at Passover as they did every year and they were singing it as Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders were there and they wanted the people to stop singing that song to Jesus Hosanna save us we pray blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Peter says the salvation of God came riding down the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey and you the leaders missed it you rejected him you crucified him he boldly rebukes the religious leaders blindness filled with the

Holy Spirit and the number four Peter claims the exclusivity of salvation in Christ there is salvation he says in no one else we all religious leaders and fishermen men and women later in Acts Gentiles and Jews we all must find salvation in this name for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved and friends this is the bold and enduring claim of the Christian gospel we have to take a moment and admit that the exclusive claims of Christianity like this are hard for us today the modern public square is secularized by design it's built to hold competing visions of ultimate things every universal claim is contestable and contested that's how the public square is designed in the world that we live in and so when the gospel says there is no other name it doesn't just sound narrow but it violates the vision of this secular age we're supposed to say

I can't tell you what to believe let me tell you what I believe exclusive claims don't fit but the Christian gospel doesn't play by those rules Peter claims and we agree here at Holy Covenant Church that there is salvation in no one else the Heidelberg Catechism asks this question why is the Son of God called Jesus meaning Savior and the writers answer because he saves us from our sins and because salvation should not be sought and cannot be found in anyone else should not be sought and cannot be found in anyone else we believe that let me ask you do you believe that claim this morning the kingdom of heaven is offered to everyone who believes that salvation can be found in Christ alone and nowhere else and so do you believe that this is the bold and enduring claim of the gospel and Peter claims exclusivity of salvation in Christ well Peter's speech ends and the council is astonished at his boldness they're still blind to the spiritual realities that he is rebuking them for but they recognize the mark of Jesus on his life they recognize he'd been with Jesus and they can't speak they have nothing to say in opposition it's remarkable and the rest of the council scene verses 14 through 22 the scene just starts to unravel because Peter has flipped this scene on its head they thought they had the apostles cornered but instead the council finds themselves cornered by two common men and a notorious beggar and the narrator lets us hear their internal dialogue from verse 15 through 17 you can just hear this kind of boardroom conversation one guy says are we going to let these guys talk to us like that these uneducated people they don't sound they smell bad are we going to let them talk to us like that we got to shut this down and then another one says yeah but we've got a bit of a credibility problem because the lame man leaps and everybody saw it happen everybody saw the name of Jesus by which this man received a new life what are we going to do about that and someone else says yeah but we can't let it happen again what if this keeps on happening and the Roman people the Roman rulers come and what if they put

[26 : 16] Peter in charge that would be really bad okay what are we going to do I know it's the name the problem is the name so let's tell them not to use that name anymore and so that's what they do at verse 18 they call them charge them not to speak and teach in the name of Jesus and then I love Peter's response verse 19 the text says Peter and John I think it was probably Peter who said this whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge it's a rhetorically brilliant response because it flips the courtroom language back on the council you think you're sitting here in judgment over us and over this name but the only judgment you have to make is whether you're going to fight God or join his side you be the judge it's bold it's brilliant it's spirit as the scene winds down they find no way to punish them they just threaten them further it

feels empty the writer wants us to feel that emptiness of their threats and the apostles go out praising

God for what had happened how will God's kingdom mission advance when the opposition hits the kingdom advances by boldness given by the Holy Spirit and specifically what we see in this section boldness to speak word words to the people in charge now some readers will instantly begin to recognize here modern 20th century political categories of nonviolent resistance let's speak truth to power that sort of thing it's not exactly what the biblical writers have in mind they had no 20th century political categories what Luke the writer is thinking about is what Jesus told the disciples in Luke chapter 12 when they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities that sounds like this scene do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say exactly as we see happening here Peter's not a master of rhetoric he hasn't been studying his Cicero in his fishing boat he's not a precursor of modern civil rights activists Peter has been taught by the Holy Spirit what he should say in that very hour and he's filled with boldness by the power of the Holy Spirit well the council meeting scene ends and we turn to the scene number three the prayer meeting Peter and John leave they go back to their friends they report everything that happened and then the whole room gather together in prayer and it's a long prayer verses 24 through 30 we don't know exactly who is in the room is it just the 12 is there a larger group the text doesn't tell us we don't want to imagine that everyone in the room is lifting their voices together praying this exact prayer verbatim in unison probably there are multiple prayer leaders praying and agreeing with each other and Luke sort of summarizes their prayer in these few verses now

Tad taught us last week about the speeches that we find throughout the book of Acts we heard one of those speeches this morning in our lectionary and Tad talked about how the speeches provide sort of a model for Christian preaching and witness I'd suggest that this prayer in a similar way is a model for how Christians may pray for God's kingdom to come we don't always need to pray this way sometimes prayer is as simple as Lord have mercy but this provides some patterns for how we may approach God in prayer and so I'll read this prayer and then I'll point out three things for us to learn from the prayer verse said 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 a beautiful prayer a model for us and three things to learn from this prayer number one the apostles prayer is grounded in a confession of the sovereignty of the creator God say that again the apostles prayer is grounded in a confession of the sovereignty of the creator God Luke summarizes their prayer in seven verses the last two verses contain their petition their prayer request the first five verses are a confession of the sovereignty of God he made all things he speaks through the mouth of the prophets by the power of the spirit he anoints

[31:55] Jesus his Messiah and did you catch it at verse 27 his hand and his plan predestined whatever it was that Herod and Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel did did did you catch that God predestined the events of the worst injustice that ever took place in human history when they killed the author of life God predestined it does that make you uncomfortable is your idea of God's sovereignty that big it is for the apostles and it's on that basis that they pray that God would intervene number two the apostles prayer reveals imaginations soaked in scriptures story of redemption imaginations!

soaked in scriptures story of redemption! In verses 25 and 26 the apostles quote Psalm 2 now Psalm 2 is a royal psalm a psalm about the king of Israel appointed by God who in the strength of the Lord goes forth to defeat his enemies in the beginning of the psalm the nations are conspiring against this king and that's the part of the psalm that the apostles quote in their prayer now there's good reason to connect Psalm 2 with Jesus we've taught from Psalm 2 before here at Holy Covenant Church so you might remember this but the New Testament writers observe that Psalm 2 longs for a better king than any king that ever reigned on the throne of David and the New Testament writers say Jesus is the answer to that longing it's a messianic psalm fulfilled in Christ but my point is not the apostles hermeneutical strategies my point is that their instincts in reading the

Bible reflect imaginations soaked in the story of God's salvation they can read Psalm 2 and say that thing there that David wrote about is this here that we experienced in our day we're living inside the story of all that God is doing in Christ and it's on that basis that they pray to God I wonder if our

imaginings work like that are our minds so filled with the scriptural story of God's redemption that it just out into our conversations into our jokes into our poems and yes into our prayers how can we have imaginings like that one theologian Kevin Van Hooser says that this is the thing that we do when we gather as a church we read publicly God's story of redemption in the scripture from the Old Testament and the New Testament in our weekly readings year week by week throughout the year we relive the drama of

God's salvation throughout the liturgical year from Advent to Holy Week to Pentecost rehearsing the story of God's salvation every week we eat and drink visible words of the gospel at the Lord's Supper and all of this together saturates our habits and our imaginings with the drama of all that God is doing in Christ through the Spirit when our imaginings are soaked in the story of the gospel our lives start to make more sense there's richness added to our prayers the apostles model that for us here imaginings soaked in the story of redemption number three the apostles are unashamed to ask God to look at their troubles!

Verse 29 now Lord look see what they're doing take action to build your kingdom friends we worship a God who all throughout the story of scripture looks down from heaven sees his people knows and acts for the furtherance of his mission and his plan we have no shame in asking that God would bring his kingdom as on earth as it is in heaven as Jesus teaches us to pray!

[36:23] verse 31 unmovable earth trembled at the touch of the creator the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit because he is the one who will power this mission forward and verse 31 they continue to speak the word of God with boldness there's that word again boldness how will God's kingdom mission advance when the opposition hits Luke argues the answer is clear not with human schemes but with Holy Spirit boldness poured out on the apostles granted by the Father for the glory of the Son may we trust our triune God to advance his kingdom and his plan even when the opposition hits through the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen the who people the have