

A matter of confidence Acts 4:1-22

Have you ever lost your confidence? It may have been through an accident or an illness or a loss of your job.

My son in law was knocked off his bike at night a couple of weeks ago. Thankfully he was ok though his bike was mangled under the car. It will take a few weeks to get back on the bike and have confidence again not only in himself but in the cars around him.

Confidence is the feeling or belief that one can have faith in or rely on someone or something. Your degree of confidence, called self-confidence, is the trust or faith that you have in yourself and your abilities. Self esteem is the opinion you have of yourself.

Realistic feelings of confidence and positive self-esteem affect how you think and act, how you feel about others, and how successful you are in life. Having self-confidence does not mean that you can do everything. Self-confident people have expectations that are realistic. Even when some of their expectations are not met, they continue to be positive and to accept themselves.

Standing in front of a shredder with a piece of paper in his hand, "Listen," said the CEO, "this is a very sensitive and important document, and my secretary has left. Can you make this thing work?" "Certainly," said the young confident engineer. He turned the machine on, inserted the paper, and pressed the start button.

"Excellent, excellent!" said the CEO as his paper disappeared inside the Shredder machine. "I just need one copy."

Life Lesson: NEVER, NEVER assume that your boss knows what he is doing

God had just used Peter and John to heal a beggar in his forties who had been lame from birth. The spectacle of this man walking, leaping, and praising God drew a crowd, and Peter proclaimed the gospel to them. Perhaps after the main message, John joined Peter in responding to the crowd, since Acts 4:1 says, “As they were speaking to the people....” Suddenly they were interrupted as the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came upon them, extremely upset that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They arrested Peter and John, put them in jail over night, and the next day brought them in front of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Although they were on trial before this intimidating council, Peter quickly turned the tables on the Sanhedrin, showing that it was they who were on trial. He points out that it was not a crime to do a good deed to a cripple. Then he indicts the Sanhedrin because they had crucified Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead and in whose name this lame man had been healed. Furthermore, Peter let them know that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).

The members of the council were amazed at the confidence of Peter and John, who had not been educated in the rabbinical schools. When the council saw the man who had been healed standing there (proof positive of his healing), they had nothing to say. After a private conference (Luke may have learned of the details from Paul or Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus), the council commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied that they had to obey God, because they could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard. After further warnings, the council let them go, since the crowd was glorifying God on account of this miracle.

While Peter and John had to be commanded to stop speaking, most of us need to be reminded of the command to speak to others about Jesus Christ. Many modern Christians think that Jesus’ Great Commission was really the Great Suggestion. Or, we think that it applies to those called into missionary work, but not to the rest of us. But every believer should be able to say with Peter and John, even under threat of persecution, “I cannot stop speaking about what I have seen and heard.” If we are prone to be timid witnesses for Christ, we should pray that the Lord would give us the confident boldness that we need to speak out for Christ, even if we suffer for it.

We all need to be confident witnesses for Christ. As we look at Peter and John’s response to the Sanhedrin, we see the source of their confidence and hence the source for us to be confident witnesses.

1. Confident witnesses are filled with the Holy Spirit.

To picture this scene correctly, we need to understand how threatening it was for Peter and John. The Sanhedrin was like their Supreme Court and Government all rolled into one. They had religious and, to a great degree, civil authority in Jerusalem. The high priest was the most powerful Jew in the city and the captain of the temple guard was second behind him. Furthermore, they had just been the main force behind the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Even if they didn't go so far as to crucify Peter and John, they certainly could make life very uncomfortable for them. They were powerful men. The fact that they arrested Peter and John, kept them over night in jail, and then threatened them with dire consequences if they continued speaking in Jesus' name shows their use of power to intimidate.

We also need to remember that just a few weeks before Peter, in order to avoid possible arrest, had denied that he knew Jesus Christ to a lowly servant girl. But here he is before this powerful body of men, boldly reminding them that they had crucified Jesus, that God had raised Him from the dead, and that He is God's only way of salvation. If Peter had been fearful, he would have said only what he thought was necessary to secure his release. But instead, he boldly witnesses to these murderers of Jesus. What made the difference? Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit (4:8).

Some by nature may be more daring souls than others, but we're not talking here about natural inclination, but supernatural power. If we want to be like Peter and John, who (as we will see) were like Jesus, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told the disciples that they would be brought before the rulers, but not to worry in advance about what to say, because the Holy Spirit would teach them in that very hour what to say (Luke 12:11-12).

Later He again told them that they would be brought before rulers for His name's sake, and that it would lead to an opportunity for their testimony. He promised that He would give them utterance and wisdom which none of their opponents would be able to resist or refute (Luke 21:12-15). So Peter's witness before the Sanhedrin was not due to his natural boldness or to his brilliant oratory. It was due to the filling of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean?

A. SPIRIT-FILLED WITNESSES ARE CONTROLLED BY GOD'S SPIRIT.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? We find a clue in 5:17, where we read that the high priest and his Sadducee associates were filled with jealousy. It means that jealousy so overwhelmed them that it controlled their actions. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul commands us not to be drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit. Just as a drunk is under the influence or control of alcohol, so a Spirit-filled man is under the control of the Holy Spirit. That is the meaning of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Assuming that you are a believer, the main requirement for being filled with the Holy Spirit is to be cleansed from all sin and to be yielded to the Spirit. A Spirit-filled person is not self-willed, but rather is submissive to God's will. Also, being filled with the Spirit implies a moment-by-moment dependence on the Spirit, pictured in the metaphor, "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16). Since the Holy Spirit's main ministry is to glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:14), a person who is filled with the Spirit will seek to glorify Jesus.

B. SPIRIT-FILLED WITNESSES OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN, EVEN UNDER THE THREAT OF PERSECUTION OR DEATH.

Most of us don't know much firsthand about persecution for the sake of Christ. The threat of someone rejecting us or thinking that we're weird is enough to make cowards of us when it comes to witnessing. We don't know what the council said by way of threats, but 4:21 indicates that they were not vague about the fact that if Peter and John continued to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they would pay a severe price. But rather than saying, "Yes sir, we'll be more restrained in the future," they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:19). Then they went back to their friends and prayed for greater boldness than they already had (4:29)!

Persecution can come from within and without the church. The challenge is to be willing to obey God and not man.

A few weeks ago ISIS stopped a busload of Christians south of Cairo, Egypt. Men, women and children were escorted off the bus and commanded to renounce their faith in Jesus. Not one person renounced their faith. All were shot in the head, one by one, as they stood for Christ.

2. **Confident witnesses** have spent much time with Jesus and learned from Him.

The council was amazed at Peter and John's boldness, especially since they were uneducated, untrained men (4:13). But they also began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. The confidence and boldness of Peter and John reminded the council of the boldness of Jesus Christ, who also was not trained in their schools. What a wonderful compliment, for people to recognize that we are like Jesus because we have been with Him!

The more that we spend time with Jesus, consume his teaching; apply it to our lives; listen to His inner voice and be obedient to it, the more confident we will become in our witness.

We become confident when we hear His words of encouragement and belief in us to continue His work.

We become more confident when we put our faith on the line, praying and believing that Jesus can heal the person that we are praying for.

Our confidence is not in our ability but His ability in us. You will only know that when you have spent time with Jesus and allowing Him to rub off on us.

3. **Confident witnesses** testify of what they know for certain.

The disciples could not stop speaking of what they had seen and heard (4:20). They had seen the risen Lord Jesus. They saw Him ascend into heaven. They had heard Him explain from the Scriptures the many passages about Himself. They had seen Him heal this lame man by His power. And so they spoke confidently about these matters. Our text reveals four things that we know for certain:

- a. we know for certain that Jesus is risen from the dead.
- b. we know for certain that Jesus fulfilled many old testament prophecies.
- c. we know for certain that Jesus performed many attested miracles through the apostles.
- d. we know for certain that Jesus has saved us through faith in his name, and that he will save any that will call upon him.

Peter and John knew that Jesus had changed their lives. The formerly crippled man knew that the name of Jesus had changed him. Anyone who has called upon the Lord to save him from his sins knows that He is mighty to save even the chief of sinners. So we can confidently offer the good news of God's salvation to any and every sinner, knowing that, as Jesus said, "the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37b). Often the most powerful witness is someone, like this lame man, whose life has been dramatically changed by the power of Jesus Christ.

Paul would a write to Timothy That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

Do you know whom you have believed in? Are you convinced, confident that Jesus is able to guard you? Do you know this for certain? If you don't, you better do so or else you will fall away when the p[ressure comes!

4. **Confident witnesses** insist on Jesus as the only way of salvation.

The Sanhedrin had asked Peter, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). So, Peter told them: We did it "by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (4:10). Furthermore, His name is the only name by which

anyone can be saved: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).

We live in an age where tolerance has become the primary virtue. People don’t object if you say, “I’ve found Jesus as my personal Saviour.” They say, “That’s nice for you, but I’m into something else.” Or they say, “All that matters is that you’re a good person and believe in something. All roads lead to God.”

But Jesus Christ cuts across the “tolerance” of our culture and intolerantly proclaims, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). “There is salvation in no one else ...” (Acts 4:12).

But what about sincere Buddhists or Muslims or Hindus, who are kind and loving people? They are not saved unless they trust in Jesus Christ alone. What about faithful church people who go to church, who pile up good deeds in their efforts to go to heaven? They are not saved if they are depending on any good works or ceremonies or religious devotion to get into heaven. There is no other way to God except through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

In Ephesians 6:19-20 the apostle Paul shares a startling prayer request: “Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Twice he repeats his request, that he might speak boldly. It’s the same Greek word translated “confidence” in Acts 4:13. If Paul had on his prayer list the need for boldness as a witness, then perhaps you and I should add it to our lists! We all should seek to proclaim with confident boldness the good news that there is salvation in no one else except in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead.