

Title: Don't make me stop this car!
Text: Acts 4.13-22
Theme: how the gospel makes you bold
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The gospel emboldens you for everything in this life.

Read Text:

John Chrysostom was a faithful pastor in Constantine around 400 A.D. He fell out of favor with the empress Eudoxia who threatened him with banishment if he held true to his convictions. John replied,

“You cannot banish me, for this world is my Father’s house.”

“But I will kill you,” said Eudoxia.

“No, you cannot for my life is hid with Christ in God,” said John.

“I will take away your treasures.”

“No, you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.”

“But I will drive you away from your friends and you will have no one left.”

“No, you cannot for I have a Friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to harm me.”

Empresses, Kings, government officials, police officers, clergy, managers, bosses, dads, moms, teachers, and anyone in authority are tempted to use their authority for their own purposes instead of God's. What did Eudoxia do? She threatened Chrysostom with everything that would threaten her. She assumed that what held power over her life held power over his and when those things held no power over him, she, the Empress, was exposed as being powerless.

Peter and John and the man that they had healed were hauled in before the Sanhedrin where they are being threatened with the “power” of the Sanhedrin to punish them. This threat was a ploy to buy some time so the Sanhedrin could figure out what to do, like that of a parent who is driving the car or van while the kids are being squirrely in the back seat and says, “Don't make me stop this car!” Those words mean nothing if the kids know that you have no intention on stopping the car because you are already late, and if you stop the car, what are you going to do? (Of course, with kids having to be straightjacketed in a 18-point car seat until they are 152 pounds or 14 years of age, some of their squirreling around options are sadly not available like they once were.)

So, the Sanhedrin is reduced to saying, “Oh, you don't want to know what we will do to you. But those threats ring rather hollow when you are arguing from a position that has just been exposed as being weak.

I. Boldness comes from knowing Jesus. (13)

Boldness is defined as a willingness to take risks; being confident and courageous. But, what makes one willing to take risks or courageous and confident? In this case, the Sanhedrin knew the answer. Peter and John were bold because they had been with Jesus. Think about that. How did being with Jesus make them bold? Certainly they witnessed the power of Christ in the miracles that he performed and they listened to Christ and were in the process of taking those things to heart. But, Peter and John were with Jesus on the mountain when the glory of Jesus was partially revealed to them and when Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Christ for a while. Moses and Elijah had lived a long time ago and were obviously still alive, though in another place. That other place was real. Then Jesus died and he rose again and they spent a few weeks with Jesus after he rose again. Hanging around a guy who died and who rose again and who promised that you will rise again too, has a way of making you chill out about dying. Then these guys watched Jesus ascend into heaven and saw the angels and heard them say, stop staring up into the sky. Get moving cause you have some work to do.

My point is, Jesus was not a historical figure for them that they grew up learning about. They knew him. They fished with him, ate with him, walked with him, prayed with him and listened to him. They knew him as flesh and blood.

I was in college when Jimmy Carter was president and things were not looking so good. One day a guy named Governor Connelly came to my school and addressed the student body because he was running for president. I knew him as the man who had been in the limousine with John Kennedy when President Kennedy was assassinated. John Connelly was the governor of Texas and was riding with him and was also shot, but was able to recover. But, a couple of weeks later another guy came and spoke to the student body named Ronald Reagan. When you hear people talk about him as the great communicator, I experienced it. When he finished his speech, I knew he would be the next president. I had never heard a public official speak like that. I waited in line to shake his hand because I knew I would be shaking hands with history. Too bad I did not have a smart phone back then, but Alexander Graham Bell had just invented the telephone a few months before anyway. But, my point is, for many of you, Ronald Reagan is a figure in history who died before you were born. Not for me. I met him.

Peter and John did a whole lot more than wait in line and shake the hand of Jesus. They lived with him. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. John sat next to him and leaned next to him in the Passover meal the night before Jesus died. Oh yea, they had been with Jesus, so much so, that what would seem to others as boldness since they were willing to take risks, was not taking a risk at all. They understood something that we need to understand. You don't take a risk when you believe in Jesus. You take a risk that you will lose every time if you don't believe in Jesus. But, since most of our world does not believe in Jesus the way we are supposed to, when you follow Jesus, it looks like you are being bold and taking a risk. The men in the Sanhedrin weren't used to someone standing up to them like this. They did not have a mental folder for this. They just didn't know what to do with these guys and it is obvious.

Excursus: How did this happen? The Jews had the Scriptures. They had the history. They had Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and David. They had the Temple, the exile and return. They had the land, the prophets and all of the reminders of God's promises. How on earth could they see Jesus, hear Jesus and then crucify him? How could they look at a lame man who was healed and threaten him and the men who healed him? It wasn't that hard to do. Let me explain.

- God gave OT Israel the Law so they would realize that life is not about them, but about God. They went off course, when they read what God gave them as if it was about them instead of being about God.

The law that was intended to expose their sin and their need of God, became a source of pride of national superiority because after all, "we have the law and the temple." They really believed that they had the law, the land and the temple because they really were better. When Jesus showed up and exposed them as not being better, they hated him. What do they need? They need the gospel.

- God gave the church the gospel so they would realize that life is not about them, but about God. The church went off course when they read what God gave them as if it was about how they could do things for God, earn the favor of God, or gain merits of righteousness based on penance, prayers, efforts and gifts of money.

The gospel that was intended to expose their inability to earn the favor of God and demonstrate the complete satisfaction of the death of Christ, became a ritualistic point system that made the penitents performance the focus of Christianity instead of the accomplishment of Christ. When the reformers showed up and exposed them as being wrong, they were treated like the Sanhedrin treated Christ. The Sanhedrin treated Christ and the disciples sinfully in the name of God, while the RC church treated the reformers sinfully in the name of Jesus. They needed the gospel.

But, rather than feel smug or satisfied, we should be warned. We can do the same thing when we think that our efforts, our resolve, our discipline, our reputation, our traditions, our theological precision, our doctrinal confessions, make us a notch or two better than others. We can make an idol out of anything and think that we are the center of things. When you read about the Pharisees, they originated because they were trying to figure out ways to make the OT law practical, and over time their attempts at practical application became additional laws that they adopted to judge and shame others. They held so tightly to that that when Jesus and the disciples exposed them, they were infuriated. That can happen to us. We can be so blind to ourselves that when someone points it out, we can automatically accuse them of being the problem, when they may be right. What are you afraid of? You simply need the gospel.

Implication – if you are timid about Jesus, the gospel and your convictions, it is because you fear losing something that you think you have to have. I am not talking about a personality type; I am talking about your internal belief system. If you have Christ, you have your soul and the world. The kingdom is yours. What someone takes from you (respect, stuff, relationships) is temporary at best because what you have is forever. This is so helpful for us. We are tempted to think: I have to have this relationship if my life is worth anything. I have to have this career, this job, this

income, this home, this spouse, these children, this vacation, this look, this hair, these clothes, this reputation, this accomplishment, this title, this control, this comfort, this health, this response if my life is worth anything. That is a lie. People think they have to have those things because they either don't have Jesus or they don't realize like they should what they already have in Jesus. Relax, you have Jesus! Enjoy the ride.

Flip the point: Fear comes from not being with Jesus (in a good way).

(16) What do we do? We are stuck. We have to scramble. We have to spin. We have to make things up. We have to cover-up because the truth is exposing us for what we are and we cannot admit that – why not? Why can't you say the obvious? Why can't you humble yourself and look at the facts and say, what if Jesus really is God?

II. Boldness comes from seeing the power of Jesus. (14)

The Sanhedrin knew that Peter and John were uneducated, common men. But so did Peter and John. These were the guys who hated school and would rather be out fishing than sitting in class conjugating verbs and learning geometry. They knew they were uneducated and now they were standing in front of all of these men who were not only powerful leaders, but the guys were smart. Peter and John had all night in the jail to worry about how things were going to go. But, what a kindness of God to have the lame man who was healed standing there with them! The presence and testimony of this man was a vivid reminder that this stuff is true. Look at this life that was changed by Jesus.

This is one of the profound and powerful reasons why the local church is such a beautiful gift to each one of us. We know that we are called to believe and yet every single one of us wonder at times, if this stuff about Jesus is really true. Unlike Peter and John we did not see Jesus or hear Jesus with our eyes and ears. We are relying upon the witness of others. But, when we hear people tell their stories of coming to faith in Christ and we see them week after week after week and they are not what they used to be, our faith is given fresh wind. When we hear people pray and believe God in the midst of trial, our faith is given fresh wind. When we witness someone reading God's Word with conviction and taking his promises to heart and telling us of the change that is making, our faith is given fresh wind. When you see people saved, marriages restored, addicts delivered, the fearful having hope, bitterness gone, relationships healed, your faith is given fresh wind. I look around here when we sing. For so many of you know I know that the conviction and resolve that you sing comes from experiencing the reality of these truths in the darkest nights of your soul. Some of you have buried a child, lost a pregnancy, lost a spouse, lost a job and yet, you testify that Jesus is still better. That is the power of the gospel, the power of Jesus displayed in your life. That gives boldness to others. Every day that this lame man lived, he gave people boldness because they saw the power of Jesus in his life.

Implication – who around you gives you boldness? In what way does your life give boldness? (faithfulness)

Flip the point: Fear comes from not seeing/experiencing the power of Jesus. When the power of Jesus is not a reality in your life, then you feel like you have to live as if it is all on your

shoulders and that will suck the life out of anyone. Fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, no laughter is not a sign of taking life seriously, it is the sign of not taking Jesus seriously enough. When you don't take Jesus seriously enough, you will take yourself too seriously and there is no hope in that at all.

Peter, John and the lame man were a reality (truth) that the Sanhedrin did not know what to do with. It exposed the fact that they were trying to control their world according to their rules and Jesus was not cooperating with their plan. He was blowing it up. But, instead of admitting this, they resorted to panic and then threats. What a terrible way to live. They were caught. They had to try to hide the truth. That produced fear and anger.

I have often said that we get angry when we want something that we cannot get. If what we want is good, then our anger can be righteous anger. But most of the time we just want our own way. And when we don't get our way, we get angry. These guys were not getting their way. Peter, John and the lame man were a gift of God for them because here was tangible evidence that you cannot bend the will of life according to your plan. You are not in charge and therefore, you cannot get everyone to do your bidding. That is good to know, because you cannot get God to do your bidding. Peter and John were bold because they were confident in the truth of Christ. The Sanhedrin was demanding and controlling because they were afraid. They were not in control and they were desperate to keep that from being known. But, that was not the case with all of them.

Look back at 4.1. There were some priests who were part of the group that arrested Peter and John and demanded that they stop preaching in the name of Jesus. But it really isn't that much later when Luke says (6.7) that "*a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*" Some of them saw what Peter and John saw. Which brings me to the final point.

III. Boldness comes from submitting to Jesus. (19-22)

When you live, as the Sanhedrin did and you are trying to maintain control over your life, you will be hell-bent on destroying anything or anyone that threatens your perceived grip on the steering wheel of your life. Peter and John were the prisoners, but they were the ones who were actually free. They were free to speak the truth because they submitted themselves to it. The Sanhedrin did not know what to do with these guys, so they resorted to their time-worn approach of threatening them with punishment or something if they ever did such a thing like this again.

Peter and John are not intimidated. They make it very clear that they have submitted themselves to Christ. In v.19, they say that you guys will have to do what you have to do, but we are going to follow God no matter what. There's no hesitation and no panic. 1500 years later another man stood before a tribunal of religious leaders who threatened him unless he changed his preaching and theology. He staked his life to the gospel and said, "here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God." The Lord kindly puts his followers into such places so that we can see and others can see if what we say we believe is really what we believe. And when that is the case, while it is not easy, there is no better place to rest one's soul than on Christ. On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. ALL other ground is sinking sand. We have to follow God and

not man. And that is true. The person who truly follows God and not man is an incredible threat to those who follow man and not God (even though they say that they are following God).

When man's rules violate God's revealed Word, you/we go with God's revealed Word. That is a non-negotiable. When the day comes (and it looks like it is coming) when the government attempts to force us not to say either from the pulpit or in counseling what God's Word says about certain topics such as the exclusive nature of salvation through Christ alone, the immorality of living together without marriage, homosexuality, the definition of marriage, or gender distinction, etc., and they threaten to fine us, take away our tax exempt status, or even demand that we close down, we already know what our decision is. I do not say this with bravado because there will be a price to pay. But, we will not change. Boldness comes from submitting to Jesus. Submit to Jesus and you do not have to fear anyone else. Don't submit to Jesus, and you have to be in charge of your world and control everything. – Good luck with that!