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INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS  
UNIFORM SERIES INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS FOR CHRISTIAN TEACHING

**September • October • November**

# THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY COMES ALIVE

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# PRAYING FOR BOLDNESS

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Matthew 6:9-15

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Acts 4:1-31

**PRINTED TEXT:** Acts 4:23-31

## ACTS 4:23-31

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one.’

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.



## Boldness

A long earthly life is not the ultimate goal of the Christian. The goal is eternal life for ourselves and for as many others as we can influence for Christ. To influence others requires boldness.

The link that leads up to our lesson is the healing miracle of Acts 3:1-10. That miracle resulted in an opportunity to teach the crowd that gathered (11-26). Peter's message did not sit well with the religious leaders (4:1). They arrested Peter and John. The question the council posed was: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (v. 7). The bold response was startling (v. 13).

Peter and John were ordered "not to speak or teach . . . Jesus" (v. 18). They had orders that superseded the council, and they fearlessly said so (vv. 19, 20).

## Release

4:23. After being released by the authorities, *Peter and John* report everything to *their own people*. They hide nothing from the other apostles and believers. The first recorded persecution of the new church has just occurred, and with it the first recorded resistance by the apostles. All believers need to know what lies ahead. Jesus had forewarned his apostles of persecution for his name's sake (John 15:18-21).

One has to wonder if that warning is yet to sink in for the apostles at this point. Jesus had told the apostles about various things that they failed to grasp, and prediction of persecution was one of them. Now they have actually experienced it.

### KEY VERSE

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

—Acts 4:31

Peter and John do not run from persecution and hide. But neither do they go right back to preaching and healing. Something else must come first: reporting to fellow believers *all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them*. Many Jewish visitors who were in the city for Pentecost undoubtedly have departed for home. But the group of believers in Jerusalem probably numbers many more than the 120 of Acts 1:15.

After being detained overnight and grilled before the authorities, Peter and John recognize their need for interaction with fellow believers. This is an important facet of genuine fellowship—the open sharing of experiences, whether good or bad. The end result is mutual encouragement and strengthening of our faith.

## Prayer

24. After the group receives the report about what has happened, the first reaction is to turn to God *in prayer*. The prayer begins by acknowledging God's place in the universe. When facing disheartening times, a return to that fundamental truth is vital. God has not relinquished control to the forces opposed to his kingdom, nor will he ever do so.

25a. This half verse introduces Psalm 2:1, 2 to be part of the prayer. It is believed that David is the author. David wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as Mark 12:36 and Acts 1:16 establish. The mechanics of the inspiration are not described, but the source is clear: God.

25, 26. In the original setting of Psalm 2, the reference is probably to the enthronement of the king and the opposition faced from enemies. The apostles and fellow believers see clear parallels with the actions of those who set themselves in opposition to Jesus. We note that the latter part of Psalm 2:2 speaks of actions "against his anointed." The Greek word

*Christ* means “anointed one,” a connection seen further in our next verse.

27. The identities of the Lord’s enemies in Psalm 2:1, 2 are known. But even as this psalm is applied to Jesus, the believers see its relevance to their own circumstances since the same people are in authority. Can Christ’s followers expect to be treated any differently than Christ himself was?

28. The culprits in verse 27 have acted according to their own free will. Their actions bring about what God in his foreknowledge and sovereignty *had decided beforehand should happen*. God had not lost control, and the death of his Son was planned from the beginning.

29. Again, it is important to note that the part of the prayer requesting God’s help is not the first part! Acknowledgment of God’s power, authority, foreknowledge, etc., comes first. Also interesting is what the believers do *not* pray for: they do not pray for future deliverance from such persecution. Instead, they pray for *great boldness* to go on speaking God’s word!

The word translated *boldness* occurs a dozen times in Acts in noun and verb forms. A majority of the uses in Acts describe Paul’s preaching. Paul specifically requests prayer “that whenever I speak . . . I will fearlessly make known . . . the gospel. . . . Pray that I may declare it fearlessly (Ephesians 6:19, 20).

In this experience of persecution the believers ask God to enable them to continue speaking forthrightly so that the progress of the gospel will not be slowed by any fear on their part.

30. The group also asks God to continue with *signs and wonders*. These miracles

confirm the message of the gospel for receptive audiences. The miracles are done *through the name of . . . Jesus*, the very name the Jewish authorities have just forbidden to be preached (Acts 4:18).

The motive for performing miracles first are compassion (example: Matthew 20:34), then as signs of the authority of the message they bring. The display of compassion opens hearts to accept the truth.

## Results

31a. The word *shaken* has both figurative and literal applications. The literal is intended here, since the text refers to *the place* where the believers are gathered as being shaken.

31b. There are five occasions in the book of Acts when people are described as being *filled with the Holy Spirit*. The first (Acts 2:4) is the apostles’ being empowered to preach the gospel in other languages. The second (4:8) is Peter’s bold address to the Sanhedrin. The third is verse 31, the empowerment to speak *the word of God boldly*. The fourth (13:9) is in conjunction with Paul’s condemnation of Elymas. The fifth (v. 52) is the disciples’ being filled with joy.

The second and third are the only ones that happen on the same day. God is aware of what is unfolding in this first recorded persecution of the church, and he knows just what to do about it. The gathered believers have prayed the right prayer with the right motives.

The result is that those gathered are and will be given the boldness they need to continue to carry out the commission they have received (Matthew 28:19, 20).

## CENTRAL THOUGHT

The church had a radical transforming influence as it spread over the Roman Empire and beyond. Boldness was a critical factor in that success. Holy Spirit-enabled boldness counteracts fear.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## PRAYING FOR BOLDNESS

### Share the News

Whether good news or bad, we usually want to share information right away. The same was true with the apostles Peter and John when they were persecuted for preaching about Jesus.

Read Acts 4:1-22. Pretend that you are Annas, the high priest. How would you answer the following questions?

1. What was it about Peter and John that so disturbed you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. When you questioned those two, how did Peter respond? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What was it about those two men that astonished you and your colleagues? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. When you commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, how did they react? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read Acts 4:18-31. Pretend you are John. How would you answer the following questions?

1. When the Jewish leaders commanded you and Peter to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, why did you refuse? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the first thing the two of you did when they released you, and what was the reaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did you ask God for boldness when it seems that you already demonstrated plenty of that trait? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What happened then? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read Acts 4:23-31. Pretend you are a Christian at the prayer meeting. How would you answer these questions?

1. When you heard Peter and John's report, why did you and the others decide to pray rather than have a strategy session on what to do next? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why did the treatment of Peter and John make you and the others think of Psalm 2:1, 2? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did you conclude that the actions of Herod and Pilate were part of God's plan? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did the dramatic event at the end of the prayer time affect you personally? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When Peter and John prayed with their fellow Christians, there were other things they could have asked God to do, but they didn't. What might these have included?

What two specific things did they ask God to grant?

How can this serve as an example of how we should pray?

# The Gospel Spreads (Acts 4-15)



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