

“The Heroic Heart that Propelled the Movement” // Acts 4:23–37 // Sent #7

Announcement:

ServeRDU

Intro:

We’re studying Acts and we’re seeing that Christianity did not start out as an institution or a building program but as a movement...

- **Victor Hugo**, who wrote *Les Mis* (and who rolled over in his grave when he found out Russell Crowe would be singing the part of Javert in the movie version of his book—should have been Nicolas Cage) said that no army on earth was as powerful as **“an idea whose time has come.”**
- Christianity was a revolutionary message whose time had come, and it swept the world without armies, money, or really even qualified people in positions of influence. It started with **12 fishermen and carpenters** radically committed to the message of the gospel.

Every movement has heroes. People who act in certain ways that inspire the rest of us. **Today we’re going to see** inside the heart of the first Christian heroes—what made them heroes.

- **My hope** is that you’ll see that this kind of heart can be yours.
- You see, these first Christian **heroes didn’t start out** that way. Just think of Peter. Timid, scared, unfaithful—he fled from Jesus at the first sign of danger and denied even knowing him. But he **became a hero through** his experience with the gospel.

*You can become just like him. **If you believe what he believed, you’ll become what he became.***

And **my hope is that you’ll become a type** of hero for those around you, the way that these first Christians were for us. You see, **even though the gospel movement** has swept the world, for many of you, it hasn’t swept through your community yet—*your* circle of friends; your family; your generation of college students; your workplace.

And that’s what this is all about, right? Seeing the gospel sweep through your community? I can’t be responsible for everybody, but I can be responsible for my generation, and I want to be a kind of hero for it.

Now, before I get into this... our culture is pretty confused about heroes. I read an article recently that said that we **don’t know the difference** between celebrities and heroes. It gave examples of celebrities who were labeled heroes for incidental things:

- **Jaime Lee Curtis** was a passenger in a car accident in August, and she sustained some minor injuries. She called her friend, fellow actress Jodie Foster, who showed up to accompany her in the ambulance to the hospital. The press published the story and labeled Foster a hero: Apparently, showing up for a slightly injured friend = that qualifies you as a hero.
- **Brad Pitt** recently pulled a fan out of the water near a photo shoot he was doing. The man wasn’t drowning; he had just fallen in the water. Again, labeled a hero.
- My fav: A woman came forward recently revealing that **Gwyneth Paltrow** saved her life and called her her hero. How had Paltrow saved her life? By almost hitting her with her car on September 11, 2001. Because Paltrow almost killed this woman, this made her late to her train. She missed the train and wasn’t at the WTC when the attack occurred. Almost kill someone (and inadvertently save their life) = that qualifies you as a hero.

These are all good things that they did, of course. I’m just not sure those make you a hero.

- *Heroes are admired for their bravery and character. Celebrities are admired for beauty and talent.*
- *Heroes grow through suffering and we respect them for it. Celebrities flounder in dysfunction... and we are amused by it.*
- *Heroes make us feel unworthy when we are around them... Celebrities make us feel special just to be near them.*
- *Heroes don't look for status, recognition, or payment. Celebrities look for the cameras and lucrative compensation.*
- *Heroes sacrifice for others. Celebrities enjoy others sacrificing for them.*
- *Heroes admit their faults. Celebrities flaunt their talents.*
- *Heroes deflect praise. Celebrities crave it.*
- *Heroes edify. Celebrities entertain.*
- *Celebrities are surrounded by crowds; heroes walk alone.*
- *Celebrities consult focus groups; heroes consult only their consciences.*

In this passage you're going to see some real heroes—and what made them so. What they did was not flashy—it was quiet and behind the scenes. But how they responded to threat, and danger, made them heroes.

Acts 4:23–35

[23] When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

[24] And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God...

First, notice that in the face of danger, **what was instinctive reflex?** prayer. **What would ours have been?** We probably would have said:

- “OK. New rule. **Peter and John can never be together again** at the same time... or we should take out a big insurance policy on these guys so if they get taken out we hire a celebrity to take up our cause.”
- “We really need a **fleet of Escalades** and some armor bearers to protect the man of God.”

- Or, “You know, **we better rethink the message.** Clearly, this ‘you killed Christ and you gotta repent because he’s the only way of salvation’ is just not playing well. **Let’s lead with** the prodigal son story from now on—people liked that.”

That’s what we would have said. They prayed. *When you are walking with the Spirit*, prayer is your natural reflex, because you realize how dependent you are on the Spirit for everything.

- I’ve compared it before to **breathing...**
- **Prayerlessness is not a self-discipline problem; prayerlessness is a sign** that you are walking in the power of the Spirit.
- Don’t try to fix an **internal problem with an external strategy.** It will never last.
- **Every day** when I get up I remind myself that apart from God I can do nothing. In my parenting. In my job. In my marriage. In treating other people rightly... then prayer comes naturally.
- **So if you have trouble with maintaining an active prayer** relationship, and by that I mean daily times—probably multiple ones, where you talk to God about all that is going on in your life, I’d challenge you to think about whether or not you really see how dependent you are on the Spirit of God.
- The answer is not just to resolve to do better, but to **go back to the gospel**, where you’ll realize how desperate you are for the Spirit’s power and how willing God is to help, and then you’ll pray naturally, like breathing.¹

That’s what they did. Let’s look at **what they prayed:**

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, [25] who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

¹ Inspired by Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*.

“Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? [26] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

[27] for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus... both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

[29] So now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants... *STOP STOP. DON'T READ AHEAD. No seriously, quit cheating. Look up here.*

- **What did they pray for?** Traveling mercies? Safety? New elected officials? **Ok, look back down.**

...to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

Boldness? They asked for *more* boldness? Isn't boldness what got them into this mess?

What do you pray for in persecution, or pain?

- Typically, we pray for protection. Or deliverance from the pain.
- I'm sure they wanted those things. But **before they prayed** for a positive outcome *around* them, they prayed for faithful spirit *within* them... **that they would be bold** for the gospel regardless of the outcome.
- They asked God to **help them respond in faith** whatever the situation.

So, again, when you are in pain, or you are dealing with opposition to the gospel—**what do you pray for?** Do you pray that God would make you faithful, even in pain, to the glories of the gospel?

What if you saw that more important than the easing of your pain was other people coming to know the gospel—how would that change how you prayed?

They prayed, *let us continue to speak the word with all boldness...* [30] while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

[31] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with (even more) boldness.

HEROES: Because they prayed this way, the gospel went forward. And because future generations responded this way, the gospel eventually went all around the world, all the way to us. **Their heroism led to our salvation.**

So here's my question...

Where does boldness and courage like that come from?

You'd probably like to be bolder, right? *How do you get that kind of fearless heart?*

((A very popular strategy to developing courage is to defy your fears. From a website on how to overcome fear: “When you feel fear about something, first relax. After you relax, visualize doing the behavior you fear successfully. See yourself doing the thing you fear. Imagine yourself in that situation without all the unpleasant consequences that might happen. Enjoy the feeling of mastery that comes with having dealt successfully with a situation that has made you fearful; and then you will be more confident.”

- **Is that it?** There's an element of that strategy that can work. I've known people who do this.
- **But there's a problem.** Even if you visualize good things happening, bad things can still happen, and you kind of have to deny that.
- So, in a sense, **if you use this strategy,** you become courageous by being delusional.))

- There's got to be a better strategy. 5 pieces to it.

1. Belief in God's sovereign purpose in your pain for his mission

- [24] "Sovereign Lord... truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus... [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.
 - "God, this all happened according to your plan. We know that everything, in its own way, is under your control, and you have purposed to use all things, both good and bad, for the progress of your plan. And so even though this feels overwhelming to us, we're going to trust that you are working in it."
- What if your **first thought in a problem** was, "God, you are sovereign, and you are going to use this problem for the accomplishing of your purposes." How would that **change your perspective**?
- One of my favorite verses? **Ps 46:10. Be still and... know that I am God; DO YOU KNOW THE NEXT PHRASE?** "I will be exalted among the nations."
 - This is one of those verses I am **ticked off about** what Christian subculture has done to it... We put it on a coffee cup with a picture of rainbow and baby angel playing a harp... This is not about your moment of serenity in the morning while you drink your Maxwell House and listen to Yanni... **it is about stopping in the worst moments** of pain and difficulty and saying, "**You are God! You will exalt your name in the nations and this problem is somehow going to contribute to that agenda!**"
- **What would change about your perspective if you saw everything in your life—both good and bad—as sovereignly ordered by God, given to you for the purpose of God's mission?**
 - Something **bad happens**—you lose your job. Your health takes a downturn. What if your first reaction was, "God, you gave me this disability, this loss, this disease, to help further your mission." What if your first reaction was, "How can I leverage this situation to further God's mission?"

- On the other hand: **you get blessed with something**—great talent and a lot of money. But you say, "God gave me that for the purpose of his mission. Not so I could build my own kingdom, but to further his."
- **BE STILL and know that I am God... Be still. Before you try to fix the problem; reflect on God's sovereignty in the problem.** That's what they are doing in this verse. Being still and reminding themselves of God's sovereignty!
 - **Men, this is hard for us because we are fixers.** God made us that way. **My wife complains...** But before we fix the problem, we need to be still in the presence of God thinking about his purposes in it. **Faith in the problem is more important than fixing the problem.**
 - **Then, you can ask** for the direction of the Spirit as you try to fix the problem.
- **Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. BTW, you want to know, Summit, why our visions are grand?** People criticize us... Because we've read the last chapter and we know that this turns out well for Jesus
 - **Jesus said**, "I will build my church..." Sometimes I feel like I am trying to attack the **gates of hell with a squirt gun**. But one squirt gun in the hands of Jesus can extinguish the whole flame.
 - **So in every problem, in every setback, I think:** "Sovereign God, you've appointed this to happen, and you are using it for your purposes. You turn **tragedies into triumphs**; and **all my difficulties** are under your dominion.
 - **OK, God, show me** how you are going to use this for your glory and **make me bold** to point other people to you in the midst of it.

2. Knowledge of the Scriptures

- Did you see how **the first thing out of their mouths** in prayer was these Old Testament Scriptures, claiming the promises of God in them? Do you know **what that shows you? They knew them.** They knew what to pray in the right situation.

- **(Eugene Peterson: “True prayer is not just talking to God; it is answering God. God has already spoken in his word... prayer is just a response to what he has said.”)**
- I’ve said this before: the Bible is a book of promises. **3000 of them.** I want to know all of them so I can claim them in prayer.
- **Peyton Manning** (more time in film room than any other quarterback. In the moment when things go differently than planned, he knows what to do. In the moment of trial, the apostles knew what Scriptures addressed that situation. You need to know that, too.
- **Know the Scriptures so well that when life cuts you, you bleed God’s word.**

3. Admiration for their greatest hero

- God answers this prayer, and makes them bolder, and they promptly get into more trouble and get arrested again. **Don’t you think that got old?** It would have been so much easier to just go back to **huddling as a house church.**
- They **had a motivation.**
- (Let me jump to chapter 5.) This time, when Peter stands up before the rulers, he says, **“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. [31] God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:30–31)**
 - The word for “leader” there in the ESV is a very unusual word. (*archegos*). Hebrews 2:10 translates it as “captain.” The Greeks used it for “champion” or “hero.” For example, it was title given to the hero Hercules. Greek heroes were thought of heroes because of their incredible power.
 - Peter gives the same title, hero, to Jesus... but he’s an **altogether different kind of hero.** He’s a hero who **used his power not to defeat** his enemies, but died in weakness to save them.
- And that **fundamentally changed** how they saw themselves.

- **If Jesus not only risked his life, but gave his life so they could be saved,** shouldn’t they at least risk their lives so others could be saved?
- **If God raised Jesus** in power when his enemies put him down, wouldn’t God make their plans ultimately succeed?
- **Believing the gospel makes you generous and bold. Generosity** comes from the cross. Jesus gave away his life for you; you give yours away for others. **Boldness** comes from the resurrection. Just like God **transformed Jesus’ apparent “defeat”** into world salvation; he’ll transform our apparent defeats for his good purposes.
- **Do not be weary in well-doing, beloved, for the resurrection shows you that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. So keep praying; keep sharing the story...**

Which leads me to #4... Their boldness came from...

4. A generous spirit

[32] Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. [33] And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s grace was so powerfully at work among them all. [34] There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold [35] and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

- **Their boldness in witness was an extension** of their generosity of life. They shared their stuff freely, and so **when their boldness** meant physical suffering, they were willing to do it, because **they believed getting the message** to others was more important than their safety!

- **SUMMIT: we wither at the idea** that someone might not like us or think we're weird and talk about us with others. We need to **REPENT**.
- **Me in INDONESIA...**
- Look at (33) **"God's grace was so powerfully at work among them all."** They were infused at God's great grace for them, and so they became gracious to others. You CANNOT be in touch with the gospel and not become incredibly generous.

5. Frequent fillings by the Holy Spirit

- You see in answer to their prayer God filled with the Holy Spirit. He came in so powerfully he shook the place where they were meeting.
- What significance is the place shaking?
 - Whenever God comes down to earth, the earth seems to crumble under his weight. It is terrifying. Earthquakes; lightning.
 - But this time, when God comes down, it's not terrifying, it's empowering.
 - Why?
 - Matthew 27: when Jesus died, there was an earthquake.
 - At the resurrection, there was another.
 - He took the earthquake of judgment so we could get the earthquake of power.
 - **We shake now not with fear, but with boldness, and worship, because the God who has saved us and now lives inside of us, and if God is for us, who can be against us?**
 - You see, after it says the thing about the place shaking **"the place in which they were gathered together was shaken... and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness."** (31)
 - The more the place was shaken, the less the Christians were.

- An important part of Christian experience, but one **largely overlooked** (unfortunately) in our church, is seeking to be **filled repeatedly** by the Holy Spirit—to have your soul **shaken** by him.
- You are **baptized with the Holy Spirit one time**, but you are filled with him repeatedly.
- Those moments are **lifegiving!**
 - **What are they like?** Thomas **Goodwin**: picked up by dad. Was the little boy any more of his son in that moment? Legally, no. He was not *less* of his son when he was just beside him. But his feeling of sonship was greater. That's what being filled with the Holy Spirit is like.
- **You should ask** for these moments—pray for them, like these early believers did.
- **Peter and John, who had seen the resurrected Jesus, needed** these frequent fillings—don't you think you do too?
 - **When is the last time you prayed for them?** Most of us are like, "I got salvation. **I'm good.**" **Oh yeah, hero.** Peter and John felt like they desperately needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but I'm sure you're fine without it.

So, 5 things that gave them boldness that will give you boldness:

1. *Belief in the sovereignty of God in his mission*
2. *Knowledge of the Scriptures*
3. *Admiration for their greatest hero*
4. *A generous spirit*
5. *Frequent fillings by the Holy Spirit*

How do you apply this?

- *I thought about **telling some stories about people who risked it all and went to mission field... and there are many of you who should apply it that way.***

- *I thought about telling the **story of a friend of mine named Amy...** standing on the table, and that's awesome... but the amount of you that would apply it this way is relatively small.*

Most of us are beginners when it comes to boldness. The very idea kind of freaks us out. We get bad images of the **pit preacher...** or the **American Airlines pilot...**

Boldness for beginners

A. Saying something when saying nothing would be easier

B. Taking advantage of opportunities when they present themselves

- **Offering to pray for them**
- **Offering to share your story:** Can I tell you the most important thing that has ever happened to your life?
- Talked to **restaurant owner** who felt an impulse to give God credit

C. Creating opportunities

- Get to know your neighbors.
- Inviting that co-worker out to lunch

D. Getting involved in mission

- (become a part of one of our ministries; go on our mission teams).

E. How about just asking God for it?

- That might be your first bold action toward boldness: **asking** for boldness

Email from one of our college students (Music begins):

When I began my freshman year at Carolina, I immersed myself in the same kind of "Christian bubble" that I had been a part of all throughout middle and high school... Christian community is awesome and has been a huge blessing in my life. This past summer, however, God revealed to me the importance of going "outside the camp" as his Word tells us to do in Hebrews: to go to the unbeliever and those who are far from God.

I did City Project here at the Summit this past summer, and one of our assignments was to read the Bible daily. As we read through Acts and 1 and 2 Corinthians, I could not get over the boldness that Paul possessed for preaching the gospel to all people. Paul is what JD would call a "Varsity Christian" and I thought that **there was no way I could be as effective as Paul when sharing my faith.** However, in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul writes that he spoke to the people in Corinth "in weakness and with great fear and trembling." In speaking, his words were neither wise nor persuasive yet still dripped with the power of the Holy Spirit. I began to pray back to God his promise 1 Corinthians 1:5 that "I have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge..." His Word transformed me this summer and will continue to do so throughout the rest of my time on Earth pursuing him and his kingdom.

Since coming back to school, I praise God for his favor. **He has allowed me to be part of leading three girls to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior within the past month.** Just last week, when one of the girls told me that she was ready to make Jesus the Lord of her life, I prayed, "God, why me? Why are you choosing to use me? This is definitely more than all I could ask or imagine!"

This summer, after completing City Project (which every college student should seriously consider doing), learning to share my faith, and diving deeper into the promises that God has in His Word for us, I have been more open to share the gospel with people on campus. *I know that my personal ability to share the gospel is insignificant because it is the Lord who does all of the work. In seeing these girls (and other people on campus) come to Christ I am reminded of the gospel and how I have done nothing to deserve God's love, yet he freely lavishes it upon us.*

Letters from 7th grader

Bullpen:

5. Trust in God

- F. Christians don't fail to be generous because of stinginess, but fearfulness.
- G. Sovereignty; fatherly care (Matthew 6)

Keller's son: "He is my hero." Me, too.

- My hope is that you will become a hero for those in your lives. Because the movement is sustained, in part, through the heroic actions of the church. You see, this massive movement to the gospel has happened all over the world. The question now is whether that movement will affect your family and your community. And that will be determined by how you respond to difficulty and threat and pain.

In Acts 4 we are right in the middle of this might movement of the Spirit of God. The mighty rushing wind is blowing through the church.

- see that you're part of this same movement and that you'll see the same things happen in your family and community that happened in Acts. Isn't that what this about? Jesus' movement has happened... and will. The question is whether that movement will affect our family and community. Whether or not you are a hero will be determined by how you respond to pain and trials?

Basis—

- H. Belief in the sovereignty of God
 - a. Where does boldness come from? Defiance? That can be delusional.
- I. Knowledge of the Scriptures
 - a. Peyton Manning
- J. Admiration for their greatest hero

- a. The hero's hero (5:30: archehos). He was like other heroes; unlike them.
- K. Experiences with the Holy Spirit
 - a. Thomas Goodwin: picked up by God
 - b. Place was shaken: common for presence of God
- L. Depth in the gospel: generosity.
 - a. You can take our lives from us!
 - b. This is consistent with the fact that they were willing to let others take their stuff.
 - c. They were bold in spite of physical suffering! We wither at the idea that someone might not like us or think we're weird and talk about us with others.
 - d. Me in Indonesia
- M. Trust in God
 - a. Look to finances; look to God!

The Making of Heroes //

Pray unselfishly

-

Experience God repeatedly

- Does this happen?
- Thomas Goodwin: picked up by God

Give extravagantly

- Fear keeps us from generosity

Testify boldly

- N. Boldness for beginners
 - a. Saying something when saying nothing would be easier
 - b. Taking advantage of opportunities when they present themselves
 - c. Creating opportunities
 - d. Asking for boldness

O. Letters from 7th grader