

FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 4:1-31 (key verse 8)

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them:
"Rulers and elders of the people!"*

In today's passage, Peter and John face serious opposition from the religious leaders. While speaking with the people at the temple, they sized Peter and John, put them in jail for the night, and then with many threats commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Surprisingly, however, Peter and John were not intimidated by the religious leaders. Instead, they testified courageously about Jesus to the whole Sanhedrin. The question is, how could two unschooled ordinary fishermen witnesses so courageously to the seventy one most powerful and educated men in Israel? **They could do so, because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.** In today's passage we will learn that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, **God fills up our human shortcomings** to become powerful witnesses of Jesus. Just like Peter and John. This morning I sincerely pray, that we receive the word of the Holy Spirit in the deepest parts of our hearts. Amen.

Look at verse 1. Peter and John were still at the temple courts. While they were speaking to the people, a group of priests AND..... Sadducees came up to them with the captain of the temple guard. Look at verse 2. The leaders were GREATLY disturbed, because the apostles were teaching the people. In those days, only the religious leaders were allowed to teach the people about God. For they were the only ones who were trained and schooled in the scriptures. So it was completely unacceptable for two unschooled, ordinary fishermen like Peter and John, to teach the people about God. Humanly speaking, they were simply not qualified. To make things worse, was the fact that Peter and John proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection of the dead! This was a totally different kind of message from the laws and regulations that the religious leaders were teaching. In fact, the Sadducees did not even believe in the resurrection!

So what did the angry leaders do? Look at verse 3. (Read) Temple guards wasted no time. They suddenly jumped on Peter and John, and arrested them. Then the guards forcefully dragged them away from the people..... and with many threats put them in jail..... by shoving them on the floor of a dark and dirty sell. But we may wonder: why would the religious leaders treat Peter and John so badly? And why would they oppose any teaching in the name of Jesus Christ? Did God not raise Jesus from the dead? Is Jesus not the glorified Son of God and our savior? Did Peter and John not simply obey Jesus' command to be His witnesses? Yes, all of this is 100% correct. **But here we can clearly learn that no matter the gospel truth of Jesus, there will always be opposition to the gospel.....and there will always be people who reject the gospel message. This is purely the work of Satan. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12) For Satan does not want people to be saved from their sin. So he uses those who are disobedient to God (Eph 2:2) to suppress the truth about Jesus.....just like the religious leaders who arrested Peter and John.**

So does this mean that Satan can stop the work of God anytime he wants? Not at all! Look at verse 4. Though the religious leaders put Peter and John in prison, many who heard the message of Jesus..... believed that it was true. So the number of men who believed grew from three to about five thousand men. That is 2 000 people putting their faith in Jesus in one day!! Here we see that although Satan oppose the gospel of Jesus, ultimately God is in control. Not Satan!

Let's look at verse 5. The next day, the situation went from bad to worse for Peter and John. While they were sitting in a cold prison sell..... the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. This was not just an ordinary meeting, but a full scale assembly of the Sanhedrin; the highest court in Israel. That is why even Annas, the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas. The exact two men who used their political power and influence to sentence Jesus to a cruel death on the cross. John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family also joined this emergency sitting of the court. With the sole purpose to deal decisively with Peter and John..... for speaking and teaching the people in the forbidden name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Look at verse 7. Once the Sanhedrin was in session, they had Peter and John brought before them. The crippled man Peter healed the day before was also present. (10, 14) So there the three men stood, two ordinary fishermen and a beggar, surrounded by the seventy one wealthiest, most educated and politically powerful men in the country – all staring with disdain at them. Humanly speaking, Peter and John stood no chance to

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defend themselves against these men. For on every human level, Peter and John were inferior to these religious leaders.

Then they began to question Peter and John about the healing of the crippled man. Look again at verse 7. “By what power or what name did you do this?” This was not an innocent question. If Peter and John answered that it was by Jesus’ name the man was healed, they could be executed. But if they deny preaching in Jesus’ name or somehow apologize for teaching in Jesus’ name, they might have had a chance of coming out of there alive! How could Peter and John, two unschooled, ordinary fishermen, know how to answer these threatening leaders? In that life threatening and intimidating environment, could they even answer at all!! Let’s look at verses 8-10.

Then Peter.... said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.”

Wow! Is this really Peter speaking? The same Peter who at the night of Jesus’ arrest ran away in fear of his life? The same Peter who denied Jesus three times to save his own life? It certainly does not sound like Peter. Nor does it sound like an unschooled ordinary fisherman addressing the top court in the land. **Instead, Peter sounded like a confident, fearless and authoritative spiritual leader in Israel!** He even taught the religious leaders from Psalm 118:22. Look at verse 11. Peter said to the leaders: Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Peter then clearly explained in verse 12 that this meant salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (12)

Knowing the character of the religious leaders, we would not be wrong to expect them to lash out at Peter for lecturing them. However (look at verse 13) when they saw the courage of Peter and John they were astonished. The NLT captures the moment a bit better. It reads: The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. But how could Peter behave in this manner? How could he changed from a fearful man into this bold bible teacher who even taught the 71 members of the Sanhedrin? Let’s look again at verse 8. Since it is our key verse, can we please read it together? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! Peter could behave in this extraordinary manner, because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit? In context of today’s passage, to be filled with the Holy Spirit is for God to supplement whatever we lack in our human ability to carry out a task for Him. We know from the time Peter spent with Jesus, that although Peter was quick to talk, he was a fearful man. Yet, here before the Sanhedrin, Peter was absolutely fearless. Where did his courage come from? Yes, it came from the Holy Spirit who filled his heart. We also know that Peter was a fisherman by profession. Where then did his understanding of the scriptures about Jesus come from? Yes, it came from the Holy Spirit who filled his heart. **In this way, God used the Holy Spirit to fill Peter up with what he was lacking in his humanity With the courage, wisdom and understanding of God to stand firm as a witness of Jesus.....Many times in our walk of faith, our human weaknesses so obviously prevents you and me from being witnesses of Jesus. Whether it is because of our background, our character, knowledge of the bible or a situation that simply overwhelms us.....there are so many weaknesses that prevents us from being a courageous witness of Jesus. These weaknesses truly discourage us! Especially when we know we have to do something for God, but are simply unable to. BUT TODAY WE CAN TAKE HEART!! For the good news is, that when the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, God supplements whatever we lack in our human ability. Then we can also carry out God’s will in our lives, to be courageous witness of Jesus. Just like Peter!**

Let’s see how the Holy Spirit helped Peter and John to safely be released to their own people.

Look again at verse 13b-14. The religious leaders took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing bad they could say to Peter and John. So what did they do? Look at verses 15-16. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.” Nevertheless, look at verses 17-18to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.....But Peter and John would have none of it! Still filled with the Holy Spirit, they wisely and confidently replied (look at verses 19b-20) “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?”

You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” But instead of agreeing with Peter and John, that it is indeed right to listen to God and not people, they showed themselves to fear people more than God. Look at verses 21-22. They could not decide how to punish them, not because it was a complicated matter. But because all the people were praising God for what had happened to the 40 year old crippled man who was miraculously healed. So if the religious leaders punished Peter and John, they would lose favor among the people. So finally, the religious leaders let Peter and John go without laying a hand on them. **In this way**, the Holy Spirit used the religious leaders’ fear of people, to safely release his precious servants; Peter and John. Praise God for the Holy Spirit who helps us in the most difficult of situations; and gives us the final victory!!

The burning question we now have to answer is; how can we also be filled with the Holy Spirit, like Peter and John? Let’s look at verses 23-31 to find the answer. Let’s start with verse 23. (Read) Peter and John reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. Including all the threats they made to punish, perhaps even kill them or anyone, for speaking and preaching in the name of Jesus. How would you have reacted if you were among the believers who heard Peter and John’s report? It’s hard to say, right? But imagine our ministry send shepherd Khomo and Donald on a mission trip to the Kingdom of E-swa-tini. Only for them to return with news from the King and his officials that if we ever again teach his people in the name of Jesus, he would come after each and every member of our ministry and destroy us! Surely, we will all be in great distress! That was exactly how the rest of the believers felt when they heard the report from Peter and John. Then how did they deal with such great opposition from the religious leaders? Look at verse 24. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. They did not run away. Neither did they decide to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Instead, they joined together as one in prayer, and presented their case before God. Let’s look at verses 24b-30. (Read) Let’s listen carefully how they prayed. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 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? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one. 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. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” When we listen to this prayer, we cannot but be moved by the sincere faith these believing men and women had in God. Though the religious leaders threaten their lives, the brothers and sisters, firmly believed that the Lord is Sovereign and in complete control of the situation. God was in control then, just as He was in control when Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel to execute Jesus on the cross. Based on scripture, the believers knew that these leaders did only what God’s power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Therefore, despite the threats made against them, the believers knew for certain that their lives were firmly in the protecting and loving hands of God. Then what was their prayer topic? Look again at verse 29. Amazingly, their prayer topic was not for God to deal with the religious leaders, or protect their lives.....or even complaining about why God allowed the religious leaders to threaten them. No! Their prayer topic was for the Lord to consider their threats....and in light of these threats.....enable His servants to speak God’s word with great boldness. What amazing faith! What a sincere desire to obey Jesus’ command to be His witnesses! God was so pleased with their prayer, that He answered them in the most encouraging way. Look at verse 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. **Here we can learn that there are three things needed for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Firstly, we need sincere faith in God that is rooted in scripture. Secondly, we need to have a sincere desire to obey God’s word and will in our lives. Thirdly, we need to raise our voices to God in prayer. Then, our heavenly Father will surely shake our hearts with the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome any opposition from Satan in our lives.....to become fearless and confident bible teachers for others.....and be equipped with whatever we need to carry out the will of God in our lives.**

In conclusion: As believers we are all like Peter and John, in one way or another. None of us went a seminary to study theology. So humanly speaking we are unschooled, just like Peter and John. Moreover, most of us are also just ordinary men and women in society. With each one of us facing unique weaknesses in our character, our background, and our daily circumstances. Because of this, we are easily discouraged from being a witness of Jesus. In other words, we are quick to pull back from speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. However, in today’s passage we have learned, that this is not God’s way for you and me. Instead, God knows all about our weaknesses and understand all our shortcomings, no matter what they may be. But despite this, He still

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wants us to obey His word and be His witnesses. So to help us, God wants to fill our hearts with the Holy Spirit so He can supplement whatever we lack in our human ability to be courageous witness of Jesus. Just like Peter and John. Sadly, most of the times we try to go at it alone. And when we fail we just quit, saying: I can't be a witness of Jesus. Or I just can't be a bible teacher or leader in the ministry. But that was not what our brothers and sisters did in those beginning years of the church. As we learned, with sincere faith rooted in the scripture, and with a sincere desire to obey God's word to be His witnesses, they raised their voices to God in prayer. Then, God filled their hearts with the Holy Spirit and they could all preach the word of God boldly. The same can happen to you and me, when we follow in their footsteps. From now on, let's have a greater desire for the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts! Amen.