

Introduction:

Throughout this year, we have examined the Jerusalem church to learn the keys to success and effectiveness. We have learned the Jerusalem church 1) was devoted to God, 2) was unified in heart and soul, 3) couldn't help but point others to God, 4) lost no one in the crowd and 5) knew nobody can do everything, and 6) aggressively dealt with problems. The seventh key we noticed in Jerusalem was they were bold in the face of rejection. Despite the attacks they faced from the world, they continued doing what God asked. In **Acts 4**, we see a specific example of rejection and the disciples' boldness. The church grew because of this boldness (**Acts 4:4**). If we will grow, we must be bold in the face of rejection. But how? Examine what happened in **Acts 4** to learn how to be bold in the face of rejection.

Discussion:

- I. Expect rejection from many.
 - A. In the disciples' prayer, they quote from **Psalm 2**. The disciples knew rejection was coming. They knew people in the world wouldn't like what God had to say. They knew people would devise plans against them. When Peter and John were arrested they were not surprised. They had been told this would happen.
 - B. Jesus had forewarned his disciples in **John 15:18-21**. This warning is for us as well. **John 3:19-21** demonstrates why. God's message is one of light, when men love darkness they will hate the messenger of light. We should expect this. In fact, we should be troubled if men do not reject our message (**Luke 6:22-23, 26**).
 - C. Rejection will cripple us only when we fear it might happen. When we are fully aware it will happen, it has no power over us. We will not be surprised, discouraged, or hindered. We will simply keep plugging away.
- II. Pray to God for boldness.
 - A. When the disciples prayed about the rejection they were facing, they specifically asked God to strengthen them (**Acts 4:29**). God does not expect us to face our enemies alone. He is with us and will strengthen us.
 - B. Do you remember Moses in **Exodus 3**? He had many fears. God's overall response is revealed in **Exodus 3:12**, "I will be with you." **Philippians 4:13** points out, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (ESV). Do you believe those statements? When we really believe them, we will confidently pray for boldness.
 - C. Pray for boldness at two different times. First, in your planned prayers. When you are praying in the assembly, with your family, and in your closet, pray for boldness for yourself and all of us. But also pray when you see you are entering a situation in which rejection might rear its ugly head. Pray spontaneously to God to give you strength. Like Nehemiah in **Nehemiah 2:4**, when the opportunity to speak arises, pray for boldness.
- III. Realize people's souls are at stake.
 - A. In many ways, the religious world seems to think "church growth" is a game. Whichever church has the most pieces wins some kind of prize. In that kind of mindset, there is really not much incentive to be bold. But this is not a game. People's souls are at stake. What gave the disciples confidence even though many would reject their teaching? They knew salvation was in Jesus and only in Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). They would not allow the mainstream religious world to deter them from bringing salvation to people.
 - B. There are numerous churches and religions in the world. Only Christ offers salvation and He only offers it to His church. If you believe people can find salvation in churches that do not teach Christ's Gospel, you will never be prompted to be bold. Boldness comes when you realize God's message saves and nothing else does. Keep your eyes on the souls of those with whom you come in contact and you will be prompted to be bold.
- IV. Empty yourself of self.
 - A. Typically, our fears about rejection are based on selfishness. I don't want people to dislike me, make fun of me, reject me, think I am crazy, not let me be involved in something, or hurt me. All of that has to do with me. When I am focused on me, I will not be bold.
 - B. **Acts 4:19-20** demonstrates the disciples understood boldness is about putting God first. They couldn't help but teach what they had seen and heard. Their lives were no longer about them; they were about serving

God. They were living Jesus's teaching in **Luke 9:23-27**. They had taken up their crosses and denied themselves. To them it did not matter if people did not like them, thought they were crazy, or called them names. What mattered was letting others know about salvation in Christ.

- C. They were merely following in the footsteps of their Savior. Consider **Philippians 2:4-8**. Rather than hanging on to all that would make Himself glorious and praiseworthy, Jesus gave up the glories of heaven, emptied Himself of self, and took on the form of a servant because He was more interested in what we needed than what He wanted. He wasn't stopped by the possibility of rejection; He wasn't stopped by the possibility folks would think Him crazy or uncool; He wasn't stopped by the possibility folks would ignore Him or hurt Him. Rather, He pursued selflessness and now we are saved because of it. How much more should we do the same for Him and those around us for whom He died?

V. Focus on those who accept.

- A. I find it interesting that Luke did not wait until the end of this whole story to give us the information found in **Acts 4:4**. Right after he told us about Peter and John being arrested, he informs us that despite the rejection of the officials, many who had heard believed. Luke, when writing, chose to focus on who accepted the teaching, not who rejected it. The rest of the story is told to give us information. But Luke wants us to know from the beginning the objective was accomplished. People were saved.
- B. It is almost as if Luke wants to make sure we don't lose sight of what is most important throughout this series of events. Many rejected the truth, but some accepted. Have many rejected the truth? Have many slandered this congregation because it refuses to teach any message other than God's message? No doubt all of this has happened. But look around you. People have accepted the truth. God's kingdom has grown because someone was bold. We must remember the successes and keep following God's pattern of boldness.

VI. Lean on your brethren.

- A. **Acts 4:23** provides great insight into God's plan. When Peter and John were released, they didn't go to their homes to be by themselves. They went to be with their companions. They had friends to turn to and gain strength from. They had friends to pray with.
- B. One problem many Christians face today is the friends they lean on are the ones they are afraid will reject the Gospel. They are in the church, but their best friends are not in the church. They are afraid if they teach the truth, their friends will abandon them. If you want to be bold as the early Christians were, make sure your best friends are the ones who will give you encouragement to be bold, pray with you to have strength, and help pick you up when your old friends in the world have kicked you down. Then rely on them.

VII. Remember, God wins.

- A. Our final point comes not from the passage we have been reading, but from the passage those early Christians had read: **Psalms 2**. It was a passage that strengthened them. It claims God's enemies will attack and will always devise plans against Him. But their plans are vain. God is laughing at those plans. He knows who wins.
- B. Many act as though they are hanging out to see who is really going to win. It almost seems as though we sometimes think the world might actually win so we do not want to offend them too much, lest they take it out on us. God always wins. His wrath will come upon those who do not submit and do homage to His Son.
- C. Whose side are you on? We cannot straddle the fence; we are either for Christ or we are against Him (**Matthew 12:30**). Have you ever noticed Jesus' second statement in that verse. "... whoever does not gather with me scatters" (ESV). Are you boldly gathering others to come into Christ's fold? If not, then you are scattering. If you would be bold, remember God is going to win, and you want to be on His side.

Conclusion:

Far too many Christians become discouraged when they find folks in the world do not like what God says. They begin to feel we are doing something wrong when we obey Him and teach His unadulterated Word. They see people turn away and assume we are doing something wrong, and so instead of being bold, they want to back off. They want sermons watered down. They want personal work classes to steer clear of doctrinal differences. They often want us to get people in the church and then perhaps sneak some of the doctrines up on them. It doesn't work. The Jerusalem church was bold and it grew (**Acts 4:4**). We may take another approach. That approach may increase the number of people in the seats, but it will not bring growth to Christ's kingdom. The only thing that will bring growth is to teach Christ's Gospel without apology and without exception and then let people decide whether they want salvation through Christ or damnation in hell. If we will have real growth, we must be bold in the face of rejection.