

# The Power of *Ordinary* | Acts 4

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Introduction:** This morning we are going to be reading together from Acts chapter 4. If you have your Bibles with you, you can head there now. If you missed last week's sermon, I'd encourage you to go back and listen to it. Today's sermon will build off of it.

- **Recap:** last week Pastor Stefan took us through Acts 3 where Peter preached the gospel of the Kingdom at the temple. It started off with Peter and John encountering a lame man at the gate inside the temple. He asked them for money, and instead they gave him something you can't put a price tag on... healing for his body!
  - o **I love how Pastor Stefan pointed out the prophetic significance of this miracle from Isaiah 35.** It was a declaration to those witnessing it (as well as to us today) that Jesus really was who he said he was; the long-awaited Messiah, the Risen Savior of the World!
  - o Following this healing, a crowd gathered and Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached a strong, convicting and compelling sermon that gripped the hearts of those that listened.
- Well... most of them, that is. There was a particular group of onlookers that were not so pleased by Peter's message. And that is where we will pick up today.

**Read Acts 4:1-13**

**Re-read Acts 4v13 again, slowly.**

*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were **unschooled, ordinary men**, they were astonished, and they took note that **these men had been with Jesus**.*

- **Don't you just love that verse?** Especially that last line, "...they took note that these men had been with Jesus." I hope that that is the desire of all of our hearts – that when people interact with us that they can comment that we have been with Jesus.
- **We are going to come back to this verse in a few minutes, as it will act as our central passage for this morning.** I have titled this message *The Power of Ordinary*.
  - o **MAIN POINT: I believe that God has set a challenge ahead of us. A calling to be ordinary. The kind of ordinary that stands out in the crowd. The kind of ordinary that points you and others towards Jesus!**
  - o **More on that in a moment.**

**Churchwide Prayer:** Persecuted Church – Faith, fortitude & wisdom "To not waste the opportunity to share the Gospel."

**Close in PRAYER**

## A. Another Fulfilled Promise!

- As we start working our way through this passage, the first thing I want us to **observe is the faithfulness of God**, for our God is not only a promise **maker** but also a PROMISE **KEEPER!** (*The book of Acts records MANY fulfilled promises!!*)
- **Anyone here ever experience the faithfulness of God?** How about a time that God has made a promise to you and kept it? (think ANSWERED PRAYER... His presence in the midst of the storm, words of encouragement/guidance received in prayer, etc)
  - o I could think of a time or two in my life. **Such as... sermon prep for example.** Now I can be a touch dramatic at times (Elly can attest) ... especially around the time of preparing a sermon 😊 I remember a time when I was prepping a sermon on the book of Jonah. It was Saturday morning and I had hardly anything written down at all... and what I had didn't feel right at all. It was missing heart, tone and order. I went to bed the previous night (Friday night) feeling anxious, but also sensing the Lord saying, "I will provide". Got up early, tried to prep on Saturday morning... no change. I took my son to hockey that morning and as we headed to the arena I was internally panicking. *"I have less than 24 hours till I have to deliver this sermon, and I've got nothing to working with... and it isn't for lack of trying! Lord, you said you would provide! Where are you?!"* He said he would provide... what am I missing?
    - After getting my son laced up, I headed for my seat to watch. I had a copy of my note (the ones I didn't like) with me, and a pen. I remember sitting down and jotting a one-line prayer at the top of the paper – **"Saturday morning... God, please help me."**
    - All at once I heard the familiar whisper of the Lord within my Spirit. All he said was **"follow the text :)"**
    - To anyone else this would have possibly been so small and insignificant that it would hardly be worth mentioning, but to me, suddenly these words brought PEACE, HEART, and CLARITY.
    - I kid you not, I turned the paper over to the blank page on the back, and in less than 5 minutes I had a complete sermon outline. I sat there stunned, and probably smiling ear to ear.
- **Do you have a faithfulness of God story?** Have you shared that story with someone recently to build them up and glorify God? When you share, make sure you highlight GOD'S FAITHFULNESS, and use it to bolster others faith!

**So you might be wondering – how does Acts 4 display God's faithfulness? What promise had He made that he is now keeping? Peter and John were on trial after all. Exactly!**

**Matthew 10:16-20**, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and*

*kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

- This is happening, **JUST LIKE JESUS PROMISED.** God is Faithful!

**Matthew 24:9, 25, 35** *"The you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." ... "See, I have told you ahead of time." ... "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

- It can be tempting sometimes to ignore or shy away from the "harder" promises of Jesus. **But who are we to pick and choose?** We love the "nice" promises in Scripture. Say the promises for a hope and a future... or that he yoke is easy, burden light... or for a new heavens and a new earth. And those are GREAT!
  - o **This is not one or the other; rather, we must hold on to ALL of Gods promises.** They will ALL be fulfilled, for His word will not return void! **(ref. Isaiah 55:11)**
  - o And for Peter and John, as difficult as this trial (*literally*) would have been, and the future persecution they would face in the coming chapters, it would have also been a source of strength for them.
    - You see, if Jesus was faithful in accurately predicting this event (and those to come), he must also be faithful in predicting that the ultimate end for the life of a disciple in Christ is not death, **BUT LIFE EVERLASTING!**
    - **Over and over again, the Lord is proving he is a promise keeper!**
    - **Church Family, we know the end of the story!!**
    - The words of **Psalm 30:5** come to mind: *"weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."*

**KEY TRUTH:** *While this promise from Matthew 10 was partially fulfilled in Acts, it is also true for us today. Times have already come and will yet come, and indeed are already upon us, when we will face trials. But Jesus is a promise keeper, and we know how the story ends!*

## **B. Jesus Forged the Pathway of Faithfulness**

Before we continue any further, I think that it would be appropriate to pause and look at the life of Jesus. In the days that are coming (whatever they might bring), we are going to have to become experts at fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our **faith**.

- **When we face trials in life, big or small, it can be SO EASY to fix our eyes on THEM instead of fixing our eyes on CHRIST. That is a sure path to despair.**
  - o We are called to perseverance, and we are called to follow Jesus even unto death. That much is abundantly clear throughout the Bible.
  - o **Phil. 1:29**, *"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him..." (go read passage in context, so good!)*

- Jesus called us to this, and He prophesied that difficult days were ahead for His faithful followers. However, in case you are getting the wrong idea about Jesus and his character, He is first of all **GOOD**. He does not delight in our pain and suffering as some have misunderstood or even claimed to be true. That's why we must know the WHY alongside of the WHAT (*this case, the what is our call to suffer for Christ*).
  - o The WHY is so that we can **BEAR WITNESS** to the world of our love for Him!
  - o God actually wants to save the world – did you know that? He longs for all people to come to know him, and therefore he is patient (not slow) in His return.
  - o When we suffer well under trial, we bear witness to who Jesus is. We show the world His power through us, and we magnify His goodness!
  - o **And our suffering will not be in vain!** Jesus will not waste a single drop of blood.
- **Secondly, not only is Jesus GOOD, he also didn't call us to something that he Himself wasn't willing to do first.** Jesus called us to be faithful in trials, BUT FURTHERMORE, Jesus forged the pathway for FAITHFULNESS IN TRIAL – the ultimate trial. The Cross!
  - o This is the gospel! We are gathered here today as brothers and sisters in Christ, with immense hope for the future glory, knowing that we will be with Jesus forever in eternity BECAUSE God is good, His promises are sure, and Jesus suffered well and endured the cross for our sake.

**Comparison:** Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke as well as Acts. **Note the similarities.**

**Jesus on Trial:** **Read Luke 22:54, 63-71, 23:1** (*Jesus was on trial with this exact group of men*)

**Peter and John on Trial:** **Display Acts 4:1-3, 5-7**

- **Peter adds, ...if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:20-21**
- **Hebrews 12:1-3, "...fixing our eyes on JESUS... for the joy set before Him, he ENDURED the cross, scorning it's shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."**

**Key Truth:** **Jesus modelled faithfulness in hardship, persecution, trial, and even death.**

**Therefore, because He was faithful in his trial, we can also be faithful in ours – but not by our own strength, but through His. In doing this, we bear witness for Jesus!**

**Dalton Thomas, "His cross makes sense of ours, and our cross makes much of His."**

### **C. Peter's transFORMATION was a Process**

- **Curious thought – where was Peter during Jesus' trial?**
- For those of you that are familiar with the stories of Scripture, you know all too well where Peter was during Jesus' trial. For those of you that might be new to exploring the Jesus and the Bible (so glad to have you here!), allow me to show you.

Before Jesus faced the Cross, he spent His last night alone with his twelve closest friends, the Disciples. Peter, being one of the inner three, was prone to speaking up in the group. Jesus announced over dinner that this very night he would be betrayed and be handed over to be put to death. He then revealed to the group that they would all abandon Him.

- Peter emphatically declared that even if everyone else betrayed him, he would not!
- Of course, as we have already determined, **when Jesus predicts something, it happens.**
- And that very night, Peter denied he even knew Jesus... **three times.** (ref. Luke 22:54-62)

**It's important at this moment to note the difference between following Jesus by our own strength as compared to following Jesus by His strength and by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

- Simply compare **Luke 22** to **Acts 4** and it is obvious that SOMETHING significant has happened which has completely transformed him! He is not the same man!
  - o The same guy who denied even knowing Jesus no less than THREE times is now BOLDLY declaring Him as Messiah and Risen Lord in front of the same group of men that sentenced Jesus to death at the hand of the Romans!
- Peter has been trans**FORMED!** (*emphasis on the word FORMED, as in a process*)

**Remember:** *"These are **ordinary men...** and they took note that **they had been with Jesus.**"*

- *"Unschooling and Ordinary" ... This was certainly intended to be an insult, implying that these men should not be leaders among the people, especially not Spiritual leaders.*
- Really what's at the heart of this observation is this... it is clear that whatever is coming out of these men is not of themselves... but something else entirely. We have already seen what comes out of Peter when he is working on his own strength. This is different.
  - o **These are ORDINARY men! That is what is extraordinary about their response!**
  - o A quick note, although I am not going to take much time on this... to clarify, this passage is NOT implying that there is something wrong with schooling. Jesus is for everyone – the intellectual included (and needed). In fact, we can please God and bring him much glory by pursuing him with our minds, including study, schooling, and thoughtful discourse with the academic world!

**There is tremendous power in ORDINARY THINGS. I believe it's the 'ordinary' steers the course of our lives, and even history!**

You see, I think we often read stories (let's take the book of Acts for example) and we focus on the extraordinary details. It's nearly impossible to not do this, because these stories are... well... extraordinary! However, we are in error when we assume that those instances produced themselves in a sort of haphazard way.

- Take for example the past two sermons given by Peter in the book of Acts, and of course his response before the Sanhedrin. We read that are in awe of the Holy Spirit and even a little in awe of Peter. *"How can this be? How'd he get so wise, so bold, so succinct in his deliverance of the Gospel, yet with such dramatic effect?"*

**Just consider the number of Scriptures he is able to quote, as an example. It's remarkable!**

- The question is, was this all given to Peter on the spot? I think that is often how we view it. Peter was just an 'ordinary guy' until one day when he hair set on fire (referring to Pentecost if you missed that) ... suddenly he became PETER, THE APOSTLE AND PREACHER! Almost as if he was transformed with the snap of a finger.
  - o Now to be clear, I am not saying that God is unable to give people supernatural power to know things in an instant if he so chooses. **But what I am saying is, I think its far more common that it happens as a process.**
- **PROCESS:** As a Jewish boy, Peter would have been taught the Scriptures and spent time studying them, including memorizing them and reciting them.
  - o Then he spent three years apprenticing under no other than Jesus Christ himself. ***He heard the sermons and teachings firsthand and received hands on education.*** He would have had the time to ask questions and make observations about the way Jesus lived... as in, he would have adopted Jesus' way of life as a part of his apprenticeship. *(seeing the process yet?)*
  - o And if that were not enough (which it wasn't), he spent 40 days with Jesus after his resurrection... where Jesus unlocked their minds to the Scriptures (Luke 24) and taught them about the Kingdom (Acts 1).
  - o And then finally, the Lord FILLED Peter and the disciples with the Holy Spirit, which enabled them to live out the mission which Jesus had given them!

**Key Truth:** It was ultimately the Holy Spirit in Peter which enabled Him to be faithful to God in His Trial. Furthermore, it was also a process that transformed him into this kind of person! (Part of the process was Peter FAILING, followed by Jesus reinstating him + FILLING him!!)

I've heard it said this way... "First you make our decision, then your decision makes you."

- **We are all being formed. The question is, which process is forming you and is it helping you or hurting you in becoming more like Jesus?**

#### **D. The Power of Ordinary**

- the promises of God (*He is a promise keeper*)
- the pathway forge by Jesus
- the process of transformation (as seen in Peters life)

To close, we are going to look at the **power** of The Holy Spirit available to us.

*When they saw the **courage** of Peter and John and realized that they were **unschooled, ordinary men**, they were astonished, and they took note that **these men had been with Jesus**. Acts 4:13*

Do you want courage? Do you want people that observe your life to be able to say there is something different about you? That others would take note that you have **been with Jesus?**

Then focus on that word **ORDINARY**. Many people make it their aim to be extraordinary, yet I've found that those who have the greatest impact are those who regard themselves as *ordinary*.

- **There is a familiar word at the root of ordinary** – do you know what it is? **ORDER**. For something to be ordinary implies that it is predictable in its order of things.
- **For example:** I wake up, head downstairs and fix myself a nice cup of coffee each morning. That is **ordinary** because it is part of my normal order of actions each day.
  - o You've heard the term "order of affairs". Something becomes ordinary to us when it becomes part of our usual order of affairs. Make sense?

So... what are your ordinary practices? These are what shape you and form you.

- Think about the term 'religious order'.
- **Quote:** *A religious order is a lineage of communities and organizations of people who live in some way set apart from society in accordance with their specific religious devotion, usually characterized by the principles of its founder's religious practice. (Wikipedia)*

**Key Truth:** My point is this... the 'ordinary' practices and values of the Kingdom, as outlined throughout Scripture and seen in the life of Jesus, become the 'ordinary' materials by which the Holy Spirit shapes His disciples, allowing them to become vessels in which God desires to fill with the Holy Spirit increasingly and repeatedly.

Practices such as Prayer, Scripture (mediation and memorization), Worship, Confession, Fasting, Rest, Solitude, Celebration, etc. (*nothing new here... this is a 'keep going' encouragement*)

- **Summer Book Recommendation:** Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

## **Conclusion:**

I've noticed a common challenge when reading stories about men and women who followed Jesus faithfully, whether in the Bible or elsewhere. There are two 'ditches' we can fall into:

1. That could **NEVER** be me... = **PRIDE (minimizes God)**
2. That will **OBVIOUSLY** be me... = **PRIDE (magnifies ourselves)**
3. The 'Narrow Middle Path' – By God's grace, allow me to be faithful! = **HUMILITY**

**MAIN POINT:** I believe that God has set a challenge ahead of us, Southland. A calling to be ordinary. The kind of *ordinary* that stands out in the crowd. The kind of ordinary that points you and others towards Jesus!