

# WITNESSES

## “Above All Else”

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#### Acts 4

#### Small Group Plan

— Philippians 2:9-11 —

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him **THE NAME** that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at **THE NAME** of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

A person’s name represents their character. It embodies what they are known for. It symbolizes the purpose and goal of their life. And in this story “the name” of Jesus had reached such a level of authority that it was both the driving force of the early church and a threat to the religious establishment.

#### **OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...**

- Who do you know whose name embodies honesty, compassion and integrity?
- How can Jesus be a comfort to some and a threat to others?

#### **LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...**

#### — **DISTURBED BY THE NAME** —

#### Acts 4:1-7

<sup>1</sup> The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup> They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup> They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

- Why was “the message” of Peter and John (v. 4) compelling and convincing?
- What was their message?
- Why was it such a threat to the religious establishment?
- How would it feel to be “seized” and “put in jail” (v. 3) for what you believed?

## — DEFENDING THE NAME —

### Acts 4:8-14

<sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what **NAME** did you do this?" <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other **NAME** under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

- Discuss the wisdom of Peter's pointing to "an act of kindness" (v. 9ff) as he began his answer?
- Knowing that these interrogators are high placed and well-educated men, consider what they saw in the lives of Peter and John (v. 13):

#### **"they saw the courage of Peter and John"**

- What was the source of their courage and how did it work in their lives? What does courage do? How does it show itself?

#### **"[they] realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men"**

- Why did this impress ("astonished") the interrogators?

#### **"they took note that these men had been with Jesus"**

- How did they know Peter and John had been with Jesus? What radiated from them that gave it away?
- Read verse 12 aloud to the group and discuss its implications for both personal faith and ministry.

## — OPPOSING THE NAME —

### Acts 4:15-22

<sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. <sup>16</sup> "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.”<sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this **NAME**.”<sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the **NAME** of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!”<sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”<sup>21</sup> After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.<sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

- Notice the tactics of the religious establishment (vs. 15, 17, 18):

“... ordered them ...”

“... warn them ...”

“... commanded them ...”

- Again, in our current “freedom of thought” society, how would these demands go over?

- Peter and John give two responses (v. 19-20):

(1) Our choice is between listening God or listening to you.

(2) We have to be honest about what has happened to us.

Do you sense any personal pride in their words?

Why does true confidence exclude pride and thrive on humility?

How would you evaluate our own culture’s response?

“No one can tell me what to do or say.”

“It’s my constitutional right.”

“It’s my freedom of speech.”

## — Calling Upon The Name —

Acts 4:23-31

<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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?<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.<sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.<sup>30</sup> Stretch

out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the **NAME** of your holy servant Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> 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.

- In the face of threats by high-ranking officials, why do these early believers immediately pray?
- Why do they rehearse God’s creative power (v. 24)?
- In their prayer, how do these believers express their view of the persecution they are facing?
- Why did they reach back to Psalm 2?
- How was God’s “power and will” (v. 28) involved in the plot against Jesus? Why did this give these Christians comfort and confidence?
- Where did their boldness come from?

### **USE IT / APPLY IT ...**

- Describe the place of the Holy Spirit in this story?
- Describe the difference between boldness and arrogance.
- How can we use the template of verse 29 — “consider” “enable” “speak”?
- What steps can we take to ensure that we “have been with Jesus”?
- Close by asking God to teach us the power of the name that is above every name.