



From Silence to Shouting

Text: Luke 1:57-75

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1. What was the most recent thing you couldn't resist telling others about? A great movie, or restaurant, or product they needed to try? Was it a piece of incredible news, whether incredibly good or incredibly bad? What was it that made telling others about it so irresistible?
2. Read Luke 1:57-64. At this point, Zechariah has been mute for over nine months, since the time the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son.
 - a. Zechariah had nine months to prepare and to think. What about your thought life right now? What are you spending a disproportionate amount of time thinking about?
 - b. How are you making time to think about the good news of Jesus and what the Christmas season is truly all about?
3. Read Luke 1:67-75. By the time Zechariah was able to speak, he immediately erupts with praise. One reason for this is his commitment to God and recognition of the good news that the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior was about to arrive to rescue his people.
 - a. Are you convinced of the good news of the gospel? What we truly believe, what we are truly convinced of, is most clearly demonstrated by our actions. What does your sharing of the good news (or lack thereof) reveal about what you truly believe?
 - b. How can you increase your level of conviction? What would it take?
4. The gospel truly is good news for everyone, regardless where they are in life, what their current struggles are, etc.
 - a. How have you seen this to be true in your own life? What area of your life do you need to most hear and apply the gospel to?
 - b. What about sharing the good news? How well do you know what's going on in the lives of the people around you - friends, co-workers, neighbors – anyone in your circle of influence?

Challenge: Who can you invite to Christmas Eve, and how can you make that invite? Make a list of three people within your circle of influence that you want to invite to Christmas Eve at Faithbridge. Write their name, a current need in their life, how the gospel speaks good news to that need, and then make a plan for the when, where, how you can make the invite within the next week.

Prayer: Take some time to pray over these things before dismissing group

- Thanking God for Christ in this season
- Ask the Lord for moments to be still and reflect on Christ's goodness
- Ask for your ears to be attuned to the leading of His voice
- For God to make known the people and opportunities to share or invite
- For the Holy Spirit to stir in your heart courage and to stir in the hearts of others a yearning for true hope, peace and joy.

STUDY DEEPER

Lord, Make Me More Bold

Do you want to live and speak more boldly for Jesus Christ? I do.

How badly do we want it? Do we want it enough to ask, seek, and knock *until* God answers us and to take risks that press on our timidity? Or, if we're honest, would we rather just keep wishing we were bolder – admiring bold people, being inspired by biographies about bold people, talking with our friends and small group members about our struggles with fear of man – all the while staying where we feel safe and relatively comfortable and letting fear go unchallenged?

My flesh likes the second option with a more flattering description. The Spirit says, "If you want to walk with me, choose the first."

There's the battle line. "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:17). But in this battle, there's no stalemate. One side always holds sway. So, "choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

If we are serious about choosing the Spirit, God will grant us our request (Luke 11:13; John 15:7), and enable us to "walk by the Spirit [so we] will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

What Is Christian Boldness?

Boldness, in the biblical sense, is not a personality trait. A typically soft-spoken, introverted, calm person can be bold at a time when a typically driven, outspoken, brash person shrinks back. Boldness is acting, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on an urgent conviction in the face of some threat.

That last sentence contains the three ingredients to Christian boldness: Spirit-empowered conviction, courage, and urgency.

If one of the ingredients is missing, we won't act boldly. Without sufficient conviction that something ought to be said or done, what's there to be bold about? Without sufficient courage, we don't have enough fiber in our conviction to face opposition or threats. Without a sufficient sense of urgency, we

lack the fire under our feet to get us moving. People who are halfhearted, fearful, or indifferent are, by definition, not bold.

But if you're aware of deficiencies in any of these three areas, take heart. The Bible gives us every reason to hope for transformation, and no reason to keep living with debilitating fear.

Jesus Bought Boldness

In Christ, “we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith” to God our Father (Ephesians 3:12).

The truth is there's no power in heaven or on earth or under the earth that remotely approaches the power of God. He is the only one we need to fear (Luke 12:4–5). And Jesus took upon himself every reason we have to be terrified of God. Now in Christ God is *for us*. And,

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32)

If we can now “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16), who then should we fear (Psalm 27:1)? Jesus did not die on the cross to have us quivering in a corner because some human being might say something mean, or stop our paychecks, or sever a relationship, or even kill us (Luke 12:4). No! For Jesus has ensured that,

neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

The only reason fear-based timidity remains in us is that we don't believe these mind-blowing promises. What freezing fears might melt away, like snow in April, if we let the bright rays of Romans 8 shine on our shadowy places of unbelief, even for just a week?

The Spirit Empowers Boldness

After sunbathing in Romans 8, we should take an invigorating walk through the book of Acts and watch how Spirit emboldened the early Christians were.

Peter and John, once frozen with fear, when filled with the Holy Spirit, were out preaching the gospel for *everyone* to hear (see Acts 2:14–41). This soon got them arrested – the very thing that had terrified them before – and their boldness astonished the Jewish authorities, who then “recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Don't you want to bear that bold spiritual family resemblance? It requires the Spirit of Jesus (Philippians 1:19).

Pray for Boldness!

The early Christians knew this. Post-Pentecost they didn't always feel bold. In fact, in Acts 4, when the disciples came back from the astonished authorities, they told the church of the threats they received. Everyone understood the implication: persecution and possible execution. So, did they flee back into hiding? No, they prayed for boldness:

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” . . . 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 boldness. (Acts 4:29, 31)

In answer to prayer, fear melted away and they received a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit and renewed boldness to *keep speaking*.

Boldness is not constant or taken for granted. We must keep praying for it whenever we need it. Even the apostle Paul experienced this. That's why he asked the Ephesians to pray that he “may declare [the gospel] boldly, as [he] ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:20). Boldness is not an option for us, but it's also not a given. Since it is not a constant gift of the Spirit, we must pray for it frequently.

Act the Miracle

But we should not think every time boldness is required we will feel some heroic swell of confidence. God often gives us Spirit-empowered boldness when, in spite of feeling fear, we step out in faith that the Spirit will provide the measure of boldness we need in that moment.

If we look, Acts is full of instances where boldness was given in situations where no doubt the speakers were tempted with fear:

- In Antioch Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas “spoke out boldly” when the Jews publicly reviled them (Acts 13:46).
- In Iconium, they were also vigorously opposed, “so they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord” (Acts 14:3).
- In Ephesus, Apollos spoke “boldly in the synagogue” (Acts 18:26).
- In Ephesus, Paul taught in the synagogue “and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8).
- In Caesarea, when Paul was imprisoned, he spoke “boldly” to King Agrippa (Acts 26:26).
- And the last thing we know about Paul is that, while under house arrest in Rome, he went on “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31).

Yes, we should pray to be filled with the Spirit. But when boldness is needed in fearful situations, and we act in spite of sweaty palms and pounding hearts, Jesus promises to fill our mouths by the Spirit (Matthew 10:20). And so we act the miracle.

Boldness Is Contagious

And a wonderful thing happens when we act the miracle: others begin to act it, too. Paul described this phenomenon:

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. (Philippians 1:14)

Paul's imprisonment for being bold for Christ emboldened other Christians. And we've all experienced this in some way. The best way to start a movement of bold witness is to step out in boldness ourselves.

Whatever It Takes, Lord!

And this is just what our flesh emphatically does not want to do. It resists the Spirit in order to keep us from doing what we want to do. To prayerfully pursue boldness in the power of the Spirit requires dying to our flesh (Romans 8:13).

But that's a death that leads to life! For "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). To die to our flesh in order to pursue boldness is really to choose life. That should lead us to pray:

Whatever it takes, Lord, decrease the hold that unbelieving fear has over me and increase my boldness to declare the gospel to everyone you put in my path.