

ACTS 4 BIBLE STUDY: “They Had Been with Jesus”

Opening Context

Read Together

Acts 4:1–22 (ESV)

Read the passage together as a group.

Acts 4:1–4 — The Arrest

What stands out in these opening verses?

Peter and John are arrested because they are:

- teaching the people
- preaching Jesus
- proclaiming the resurrection from the dead

Important Background

The Sadducees were part of the religious ruling class in Jerusalem.

One important detail:

They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

So when Peter and John proclaim:

“Jesus is alive”

this is not a minor disagreement.

It threatens:

- their theology
- their authority
- their position
- and their control over the people

If Jesus truly rose from the dead, then THEY crucified their own Messiah.

Discuss Together

- Why do you think the resurrection was so offensive to the religious leaders?
- Why is the resurrection still central to Christianity today?
- What would Christianity become if Jesus had not truly risen from the dead?

Acts 4:5–7 — Standing Before Power

Luke now gives us specific names:

- Annas
- Caiaphas
- the high-priestly family

These were real historical figures.

Some are even mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus.

Luke is grounding Christianity in real history.

Our faith is not built on mythology or vague spirituality.

The gospel happened:

- in real places
- among real rulers
- in real history

Important Observation

Peter is now standing before many of the same men involved in Jesus' arrest and execution.

Think about the contrast.

Only weeks earlier:

- Peter denied Jesus publicly
- Peter was afraid
- Peter fled

Now he stands boldly before the most powerful men in Jerusalem.

What changed?

Jesus is alive.

And Peter has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Discuss Together

- Why does it matter that Christianity is rooted in real history?
- What does Peter's transformation teach us?
- Have you ever seen God transform fear into boldness in someone's life?

Acts 4:8–12 — Boldness Through the Holy Spirit

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...”

When Peter begins to speak, notice what he does not do.

- He doesn't defend himself

Peter speaks:

- clearly
- boldly
- directly
- without compromise

He tells the rulers:

“Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...”

Peter does not soften the truth.

But his boldness is not arrogance.

It is Spirit-filled conviction.

The Resurrection

At the center of Peter's message is one truth:

JESUS IS ALIVE.

Everything in Christianity flows from that reality.

The resurrection means:

- sin has been dealt with
- death has been defeated
- Christ is Lord
- salvation is real
- hope is eternal

Paul later says:

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...”

Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Acts 4:12 — Salvation in Christ Alone

“And there is salvation in no one else...”

Jesus is not presented as:

- one option among many
- one teacher among many
- one spiritual path among many

He is the only Savior.

Important Clarification

There are philosophies and practices that may:

- calm the mind
- regulate emotion
- produce temporary peace

But none of those things can:

- forgive sin
- reconcile us to God
- regenerate the heart
- give eternal life

Temporary peace is not the same thing as salvation.

Only Christ reconciles sinners to God.

Discuss Together

- Why is the exclusivity of Jesus difficult for many people to accept?
- What is the difference between temporary peace and true salvation?
- What stands out to you about Peter’s boldness here?

Acts 4:13 — “They Had Been with Jesus”

This is the heart of the passage.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men... they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

The religious leaders noticed something unmistakable.

These ordinary men reminded them of Jesus.

What Did They See?

They saw:

- boldness
- clarity
- authority
- courage
- spiritual conviction

Peter and John were not elite scholars.

- They were ordinary men... and yet something about them reflected Christ.

The conclusion:

“They had been with Jesus.”

John 14 Connection

Jesus told Philip:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Jesus perfectly revealed the Father.

Now through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers are progressively conformed into the image of Christ.

Not that we become Christ.

But His life begins to become visible in us.

Reflect Together

- What does it practically mean to “be with Jesus” today?
- What kinds of things become visible in a life transformed by Christ?
- What habits help believers remain close to Jesus?
- If people observed our lives closely, what would they recognize?

Acts 4:14–17 — The Tragedy of Hardened Hearts

The religious leaders could not deny the miracle.

The healed man was standing there.

The evidence was undeniable.

And yet instead of asking:

“Could Jesus really be the Messiah?”

They asked:

“How do we stop this message from spreading?”

The Example of Lazarus

Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Many witnessed it.

But instead of humbly receiving the truth:

- the religious leaders plotted against Jesus
- and even plotted against Lazarus

This reveals something important about the human heart.

Unbelief is not always caused by lack of evidence.

Sometimes unbelief is rooted in a refusal to surrender.

This is why the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary.

Only God can soften the human heart.

Discuss Together

- Why do people sometimes resist truth even when evidence is strong?
- What does this passage teach us about the human heart?
- Why is the work of the Holy Spirit necessary in salvation?

Acts 4:17–18 — The Attempt to Silence the Gospel

The council commands the apostles:

“Speak no more in this name.”

The leaders do not investigate honestly.

They attempt to suppress the message.

Why?

Because the gospel threatens:

- pride
- control
- power
- self-rule

And yet the truth continues to spread.

Jesus is alive.

And the resurrection cannot be silenced.

Final Reflection

Acts 4 reminds us that Christianity is not merely a philosophy or religious system.

It is the announcement that:

Jesus Christ is alive.

And when people truly encounter Him:

- lives change
- boldness grows
- hearts are transformed
- and the presence of Christ becomes visible in ordinary people

Peter and John were not impressive by worldly standards.

But they had been with Jesus.

And it showed.

Final Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you most from Acts 4?
- In what ways do you want to grow in boldness for Christ?
- What does it look like to remain close to Jesus in everyday life?
- What are some practical ways the church can devote itself to the rhythms we see in Acts 2:42–47?
- What would it look like for people around us to recognize that we have been with Jesus?