

Week 3

JAMAICA BAPTIST UNION MISSION AGENCY

MISSION MONTH BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES

Theme: Partnering with God; Fulfilling God's Mission

Week 3

Topic: Becoming Confident Witnesses

Texts: Acts 4:1-22

Objective: To identify features which contribute to our becoming confident witnesses as we seek to fulfil God's mission.

Setting the Stage: Have you ever wished that you didn't have to share your faith publicly? Please share.

BIBLICAL BLURB

The narrative in Acts 3 regarding the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple and the subsequent address by Peter provide the background to the happening recorded in chapter 4.

Here the religious leaders, who were greatly disturbed by the miracle and preaching that followed, decide to intervene with self-centred motives. The Sadducees and the priestly aristocrats did not believe that anyone but the priests should be instructing the people in spiritual matters. Consequently, they had Peter and John arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (the highest legislative and judicial body in Israel). They asked them "*by what power or what name did you do this?*" (4:7b). It would seem that they were not really interested in knowing how the miracle took place, but with the emphatic placement of **you** in the question, suggest the contempt with which they held these "unschooled, ordinary men," (Acts 4:13.)

In Peter's response we see the power of the Holy Spirit at work. Here were "unschooled, ordinary men" speaking with courage and boldness, and who were not intimidated by being arrested by this council. Peter and John may have recalled another promise made by Jesus in Luke 21:12-15 (NIV).

That promise was fulfilled in this divinely ordained mission. But what may we infer from the text?

TEACHING POINTS

1. *Spirit-filled Witnesses Are Confident Witnesses*

What can we recall about Peter and the other disciples prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit?

- They disowned and deserted Him when He was arrested (Mark 14:50).
- Peter denied knowing Jesus when he was confronted by a lowly servant girl, in order to avoid possible arrest (Luke 22:54-62).

Now notice the remarkable difference in the courage and boldness displayed here by the apostles. Peter is now standing before a powerful body of Jewish leaders knowing quite well what they could do but boldly reminding them that they were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. If Peter had feared for his life there and then, he only would have said what he thought necessary to secure his release. Instead, he spoke truth to powers without being concerned about the consequences. This is the power that comes when the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives.

Christians cannot afford to overlook this important requirement in their lives to witness for Christ. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is integral in our witnessing life, even if we have equipped ourselves with the knowledge of the scriptures or the 'how to' of personal witnessing.

This reliance on the Spirit does not preclude the need for training in personal evangelism, on the premise that the Holy Spirit will "tell you what to say" in a given situation. If you look at Jesus' promise in John 14:26, you will notice it says the Holy Spirit will bring to **remembrance** what was taught previously, and will guide you in how to use it when the need arises. Therefore, confident witnesses must also be students of the Word.

2. *Spirit-filled Witnesses Obey God Rather Than Man*

The disciples would have been mindful of what the Jews had done to Jesus resulting in his death. Maybe, this council were hoping that Peter and John would have sought to preserve themselves and simply comply with their orders to be silent. Not so; the disciples made it quite clear that they would rather listen to (obey) God rather than men because "*we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*" (v.20).

Let us note that, Peter and John were not disrespectful in their response. They showed their submission to the council's authority by asking them to make that judgement, thereby appealing to their conscience. In so doing, they were also pointing out to the council the limits to their authority and how they were abusing it when they prohibited divinely ordained actions. With this said, upon their release, they went back to the believers and prayed for greater boldness to speak for God (vv. 23-30).

29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Notice in the prayer, they did not ask for protection from the threats, nor did they seek to change their mode of operation, instead their prayer suggests that they were resolute in continuing as before. They were not backing down from the mission.

3. Confident Witnesses Spend Time With Jesus and Learn From Him

13 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.

What do you understand by the expression **"they had been with Jesus."**

Being with Jesus isn't merely about being among the crowd that followed him wherever he went. It means that Jesus had been deliberate in his instructions to them regarding the kingdom of God and the transforming potential of sacrificial love. It means that their new spiritual orientation was the result of the compelling impact of Jesus' focused faith in God and his own faithfulness to the mission of God. It means that the apostles had learned much from their interactions with Jesus and were ready to imitate him in fulfilling their commitment to God's mission.

Summary

All the preceding is possible when and where we have a personal relationship with Christ. To be with Jesus is to get to know Him for one's self. To be with Jesus is to allow Him to have His own way in our lives and being prepared to be submissive to His will.

To learn from Him is to be willing to imitate Him in His love, humility and submissiveness to the Father (Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:5-8). To learn from Him is being able to pray and live *"Father not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The religious leaders tried to intimidate Peter and John. What do you think would have happened if Peter and John had allowed this to keep them silent?
- Why do you think they were not afraid? What lesson can we take away from this narrative when we feel afraid to take a stance in defence of our faith?