

Acts 4:5–12

Introduction

Acts 4:5–12 shows Peter standing before some of the same religious authorities connected with the trial of Jesus. Only a short time earlier, Peter had denied knowing Jesus because he was afraid. Now he stands openly before Jerusalem's leaders and names Jesus without hesitation.

The difference is not simply that Peter has become more confident. Pentecost has happened. Peter has encountered the risen Christ and has been filled with the Holy Spirit. His courage comes from grace.

Background

- Acts is the second volume of Luke's account of Jesus and the early Church.
- Acts 1:8 gives the movement of the book: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.
- Acts 4 takes place early in the Church's life while the disciples are still centered in Jerusalem.
- The immediate background is Acts 3, where Peter and John encounter a man unable to walk from birth.
- Peter heals him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
- Peter immediately refuses to take credit and points the crowd toward Jesus.
- The priests, temple guard, and Sadducees become disturbed because Peter and John are proclaiming the resurrection.
- Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Jewish ruling council.

Acts 4:5–7

“By What Power or What Name?”

The rulers, elders, and teachers of the law gather in Jerusalem. Luke names Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others from the high priestly family. These names connect the scene with the leadership involved in Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

The council asks, “By what power or what name did you do this?”

- In Scripture, a “name” represents identity, authority, and character.
- The council wants to know who stands behind the apostles' actions.
- Peter does not claim personal power.
- He answers by pointing directly to Jesus.

Acts 4:8–9

Filled With the Holy Spirit

Before Peter answers, Luke tells us that he is “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

- Peter's courage comes from the Spirit, not personality or willpower.
- Jesus had promised that the Spirit would give His followers words when they stood before rulers.
- Acts 4 shows that promise being fulfilled.
- Peter points out that they are being questioned because of an “act of kindness.”
- The word for the man being “healed” is related to the biblical language of being saved or made whole.
- The physical healing points toward the larger saving work of God.

Key Truth: The Holy Spirit gives ordinary people what they need to speak faithfully in difficult moments.

Acts 4:10

Jesus Christ of Nazareth

Peter names the source of the healing clearly: Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

He says that Jesus is the One “whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.”

- Human authorities rejected Jesus.
- God raised Him.
- The resurrection shows that human judgment was not the final judgment.
- The healed man standing before the council is visible evidence that the work of Jesus continues.

Peter's words should not be used to place collective blame on Jewish people. Peter, John, the healed man, Jesus, and the leaders all belong to first-century Jewish life. Peter's emphasis is resurrection, not ethnic blame.

Acts 4:11

The Rejected Stone Becomes the Cornerstone

Peter quotes Psalm 118:22: “The stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

- Jesus had already applied this Scripture to Himself in Luke 20.
- Builders are expected to recognize a valuable stone.
- The leaders rejected the One whom God chose.
- Religious authority does not guarantee spiritual understanding.
- Human rejection cannot stop God's purpose.

Key Truth: What people rejected, God made central.

Acts 4:12

No Other Name

Peter moves from the healing of one man to the salvation of all humanity: “Salvation is found in no one else.”

- Jesus is not presented as one spiritual option among many.
- Peter identifies Jesus as God’s unique means of salvation.
- “Under heaven” gives the statement universal reach.
- Jesus is not Savior for one nation or culture alone.
- The rest of Acts shows the gospel crossing ethnic, social, and geographic boundaries.
- Salvation is “given,” which means it is grace, not something we earn.

The salvation found in Jesus is specific in its source but universal in its invitation.

Key Truth: Christians do not save themselves. Jesus saves.

Wesleyan Emphasis

- Wesleyan theology begins with grace.
- God acts before we do.
- God raised Jesus.
- God sent the Holy Spirit.
- God empowered Peter.
- God offers salvation.

Prevenient grace teaches that God is already reaching toward every person before that person turns toward Him. Grace awakens, draws, convicts, and enables a genuine response, but it does not force one.

Wesley also understood salvation as more than forgiveness.

Salvation includes:

- pardon from sin
- new birth
- freedom from sin’s power
- growth in holiness
- restored relationship with God
- renewal of God’s image within us

The healed man becomes a picture of God’s larger work of restoration and wholeness.

Wesleyan Emphasis: Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone, while God’s grace reaches toward every human being.

Living the Passage

- **Keep Jesus at the center.** Buildings, traditions, programs, attendance, and personalities cannot be the cornerstone. Jesus is.
- **Serve and speak.** Peter and John help a suffering man and then explain that Jesus is the source of their hope.
- **Depend on the Holy Spirit.** Peter’s courage did not come from natural boldness. The Spirit gave him what he needed.
- **Speak clearly without becoming harsh.** Christians can confess Jesus as Savior while treating people of other beliefs with dignity and love.
- **Let grace produce humility.** If salvation is a gift, there is no room for spiritual superiority.
- **Remember that rejection is not the final word.** The rejected stone became the cornerstone.
- **Make the gospel visible.** The grace we proclaim should be seen in the way we serve, forgive, welcome, and care for people.

Discussion Questions

1. What changed between Peter’s denial of Jesus and his testimony in Acts 4?
2. Why does Luke emphasize that Peter and John are being questioned after an “act of kindness”?
3. What does it mean to act “in the name of Jesus”?
4. Why does Peter refuse to take credit for the healing?
5. How can Christians say clearly that salvation is found in Christ while still treating people of other beliefs with respect and love?
6. What does the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone teach us about human judgment and God’s purposes?
7. What are some things churches are tempted to place at the center besides Jesus?
8. Where might you need the Holy Spirit to give you courage?
9. How can our congregation make the grace of Jesus more visible in our community?
10. If Jesus is truly our cornerstone, what might need to change in the way we live, serve, or speak about our faith?