

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

For the most part, we live in a world where following Jesus is not considered life threatening. Sure, people tend to get tired of “overbearing” Jesus folk, and the culture tends to discount faith, but to the best of my knowledge, no one has been arrested in Lubbock, Texas and told, like Peter and John in Acts 4.1-22 to “not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

That’s a shame, really. When life gets too easy, we lose the value of those things that mean the most. It is interesting that within the book of Acts, it is when persecution was at its worst that the spread of the gospel was at its best.

What amazes me most, however, in this section of scripture is the way the disciples reacted to this threat. To me, it is an indicator of what our reaction should be whenever our faith is threatened or whenever we face challenges in the midst of the world around us. What can we learn from these disciples that will help us also speak God’s word with boldness?

Summary of the Text:

While our main section of reading for group is Acts 4.23-21, you will need to read the entire chapter to be able to set the stage for the lesson.

We find in 4.1-22 Peter and John seized and put into jail, then facing a trial of sorts. The leaders of the Jews face a dilemma: they need these people to quit spreading the message of Jesus, but must do so carefully because what has happened has already created too much attention. To just eliminate Peter and John could result in negative backlash. So, the next most logical thing would be to just ask them ... well, command them ... to stop preaching. Peter and John, of course, respond that they cannot help but spread the message. They have no choice.

If the text stopped here, I wonder what we would think the next step would be for these men. Do they become savvy in the way they share their faith? Do they tone it down a little? Do they move to another area, one where they would attract less attention, perhaps? How would we have responded?

In their response, we discover several things.

First, I think it is significant that they went back “to their own people.” When things got challenging for them, they knew where to go to get support and encouragement.

Second, the entire group responds with prayer. Do not overlook the significance of this. We do this when we find out about an illness or there is some sort of crisis someone faces. On 9-11, many churches opened their door for a prayer service. It is a somewhat natural response for those who believe. I am afraid, however, we do not do that often enough. How often does your initial reaction to an issue involve planning how *you* are going to overcome the problem? How often do you develop some sort of strategy to deal with the issue?

Third, within their prayer, we discover the followers recognize God for who he is first. They do not just go to their request, but recall that the one they are praying to is the creator of the heavens and earth. Related specifically to their

LESSON #29

Date: 04/07/2013

Text: Acts 4.23-31

The Story: Chapter 28

The Big Picture: When you face a challenge to your faith, how do you address it? On a wing and a prayer ... or just a prayer?

Materials Needed: none

crisis, this is the God who is in charge of everything. If he cannot address this issue, then there may not be anyone who can.

Related to this, we also see that the followers recognize the struggle they are in is not an isolated event that has not been seen before. In fact, they relate this event back to scripture, even quoting Psalm 2, which is directly related to the persecutions they are facing.

Fifth, the disciples do not back down from the challenge, but enabled by the power of God, they instead ask that they be able to face this head on. Don't allow us to continue to just do the same thing we have already done, they ask, but allow people to be healed and more miracles to happen so that the name of Jesus is spread more, not less.

Finally, and this is not something the disciples did but a response to their prayer, the place was shaken and they are filled with the Holy Spirit, enabling them to speak with boldness. They did exactly what they had prayed to be able to do. I do not know exactly how the place was shaken (did they feel it or did they just think they felt it?) but I know that God, in a sense, validates their request through both the shaking and their actual preaching with boldness.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the next passage shows us the disciples "one in heart and in mind." When people gather together to face challenges of faith, and when they pray for God's guidance and power, the result is a life that looks a lot like what we see in Acts 4.32-37.

There is much that can be taken from this passage and I hope that the discussion questions can help bring out some practical ways your group can live out this passage in their own life in the upcoming weeks.

Preparing for the Group Time:

Spend some thinking about your reaction to times of challenge or crisis in your life. How do you respond in faith? What sort of things do you do and what is your first reaction? How can this story help you do a better job of reacting?

Living the Story

Lesson #29

Text: Acts 4.23-31

Lesson Outline:

Open your group time asking people to share the most challenging thing they have ever done, like run a marathon or learn a new language, etc. How did they go about accomplishing their goal? What was the process they used? What did they learn through this?

Summarize Acts 4.1-22 for your group. Ask them: How would you respond at this point if you were Peter and John?

Read Acts 4.23-31.

Ask the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

Discussion Questions:

What about the reaction of the disciples makes perfect sense? In other words, is something that you would say: I would have done that.

What about their reaction amazes and astounds you?

What purpose does the quoting of Psalm 2 serve within the prayer? How do you think that would be beneficial to our prayer life today?

How cool would it be to have the place you were in shake after you had prayed?

When you face a challenge in your faith, how often is gathering with a group of followers of Jesus and praying your "go-to" response? Why is this the case?

What challenges do you face that Acts 4 might serve as a good example for how to handle that challenge?

How could going to God in prayer first change the way we live out our life together as group and the way we live and act as a church? Do you think the result would be similar to what we see in Acts 4.32-37?

For the Children:

Children often pray for the impossible. They assume the best while our life experiences often cause us to think of the worst. Spend some time, if you include your children, asking your children what they would do if they were in the shoes of Peter and John. Ask them also what they would pray for when they prayed about the situation.

Living the Story:

Living the story out this week, I think, would include identifying challenges we face and then bringing them to God in ways similar to what we see here in Acts 4. Obviously, different challenges may bring about different requests, but the action is still going to be very much the same.

Next Week:

Next week we begin looking at the book of Acts, chapters 7-12. We will still be in *The Story* chapter 28.