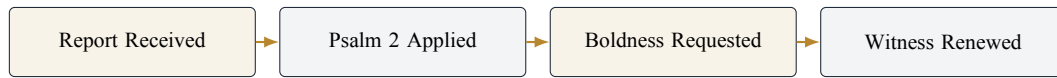


Session 17 Grant Unto Thy Servants Boldness

Acts: The Book That Explains Everything

Session 17 | Acts 4:23-31



Before You Read

Big idea: The Jerusalem believers answer threats with prayer, recognizing the opposition described in Psalm 2 and asking for boldness. God answers with a shaken meeting place, the filling of the Holy Ghost, and renewed testimony.

Where we resume: The council has released Peter and John under further threats after commanding them not to speak or teach in Jesus' name (Acts 4:18-22). The apostles return to their own company. The public hearing has ended, but the danger has not.

Why stop at verse 31? The report, prayer, and answer form a complete unit. Verse 32 introduces shared possessions; Barnabas' gift in verses 36-37 prepares the contrast with Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5.

Read alongside: Psalm 2 and Luke 23:1-25. Notice who gathers against Jesus, what the believers ask God to do, and how verse 31 answers verse 29.

Four movements to keep watching

- **The report and the Creator (vv. 23-24):** The believers hear the threats and address the God who made all things.
- **The Scripture and its application (vv. 25-28):** Psalm 2 explains the gathering against God's Anointed, while God's purpose stands.
- **The request (vv. 29-30):** They ask for bold speech, healing, and signs in Jesus' name.
- **The answer (v. 31):** The place is shaken, the company is filled with the Holy Ghost, and the word is spoken boldly.

A simple right-division reminder: This remains the Twelve's Jerusalem witness within Israel's prophetic kingdom setting. Later Pauline teaching can illuminate enduring principles while preserving the message, signs, and audience Luke identifies here.

Acts 4:23

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

What does the passage say?

- Peter and John return to their fellow believers after their release.
- They report the words of the chief priests and elders, including the threats and prohibition of their witness.
- Their experience becomes a concern shared by the gathered company.

Words to notice

- **Being let go** - Connects the prayer directly to the council's decision in verse 21.
- **Their own company** - Their own people or companions. Luke does not give the number present or identify every

person in the gathering.

- **Reported all** - The account centers on what the rulers said. The listeners learn the actual demand confronting the apostles.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 4:17-21 - The rulers command silence and reinforce the command with threats.
- Acts 12:12-17 - After a later release, Peter again goes to believers gathered in prayer and reports what happened.

Do not miss

- Release is not the same as freedom to preach without opposition. The council has let the men go while attempting to bind their speech.
- The company responds to a specific threat against the testimony Jesus commissioned, rather than to a general feeling of uncertainty.

Acts 4:24

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

What does the passage say?

- The believers respond together in prayer.
- They begin by acknowledging God's identity and His work as Creator.
- Before asking about the rulers, they address the One whose authority extends over the whole creation.

Words to notice

- **With one accord** - In agreement and shared purpose. The words do not establish that everyone recited every syllable simultaneously.
- **Lord** - Here the Greek word is *despotes*, master or sovereign owner. The modern English word "despot" often suggests cruelty, but that negative sense does not

belong to this address to God.

- **Thou art God** - The prayer acknowledges who God is; it does not try to establish His authority by the strength of the gathering's emotion.
- **Heaven ... earth ... sea** - The whole created order and everything within it stand under His power.

Cross-references worth marking

- Exodus 20:11 - The LORD made heaven, earth, the sea, and all that is in them.
- Nehemiah 9:6 - Israel's prayer acknowledges the LORD as Creator and preserver of all things.

Do not miss

- The rulers have real power, but they exercise it within a world God made. Beginning with the Creator puts the council's threats in their proper proportion.
- The prayer will move from what God has made to what God has said. Creation and Scripture together establish the basis of the request.

Acts 4:25

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

What does the passage say?

- The company addresses God as the One who spoke through David.
- They quote Psalm 2:1, beginning a quotation that continues into verse 26.
- The psalm describes opposition whose plans cannot overturn God's purpose.

Words to notice

- **Who ... hast said** - God remains the subject. David's mouth is the human means through which He speaks.
- **Thy servant David** - Acts identifies David with this psalm even though Psalm 2 has no author named in its KJV heading.

- **Heathen** - The Gentile nations. The word is not limited to especially uncivilized people.
- **Imagine vain things** - Devise or meditate upon empty plans. "Imagine" here concerns plotting, while "vain" describes the futility of opposing God's purpose.

Cross-references worth marking

- Psalm 2:1-3 - The nations, peoples, kings, and rulers join against the LORD and His Anointed.
- Acts 1:16 - Peter previously identified Scripture as what the Holy Ghost spoke by David's mouth.

Do not miss

- The believers find an explanation of the conflict in Scripture. Their opponents' resistance to Jesus fits the rebellion against God's Anointed described in the psalm.
- "Vain" does not mean harmless. The plotting led to real suffering and death, yet it could not defeat God's purpose.

Acts 4:26

The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

What does the passage say?

- The quotation continues with Psalm 2:2.
- Kings and rulers join the opposition already described among the nations and peoples.
- Their opposition is directed against both the Lord and His Christ.

Words to notice

- **Stood up** - Took their stand in resistance.
- **Gathered together** - A united opposition. Verse 27 repeats this expression when naming the participants in Jesus' rejection.
- **His Christ** - His Anointed One. Psalm 2:2 says "his anointed"; Acts identifies this title with Jesus, whom

God anointed (v. 27).

Cross-references worth marking

- Psalm 2:6-9 - God's response includes His King in Zion and authority over the nations.
- Luke 23:12 - Herod and Pilate became friends during the proceedings against Jesus, although they had previously been enemies.
- Revelation 19:19 - The kings of the earth gather against Christ, showing the continuing prophetic theme of opposition to His rule.

Do not miss

- Agreement among powerful people does not make their cause righteous. Their gathering is defined by the One they oppose.
- Acts 4 identifies the opposition described in Psalm 2, but does not announce that every part of the psalm is now completed. The King's rule over the nations and His final judgment must also be accounted for.

Acts 4:27

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

What does the passage say?

- The believers apply the psalm to the gathering against Jesus.
- They name Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel.
- Jesus is the Anointed One against whom these participants joined.

Words to notice

- **For of a truth** - Introduces the actual events corresponding to the Scripture just quoted.
- **Thy holy child Jesus** - "Child" here does not describe Jesus as an infant. The Greek word *pais* can express child or servant according to context; the KJV also renders it "Son" of Jesus in Acts 3:13, 26.
- **Whom thou hast anointed** - Makes the identification

explicit: Jesus is God's Christ.

- **Herod ... Pilate ... Gentiles ... Israel** - Royal and governing authorities, together with Gentile and Israelite participants, stand within the accusation.

Cross-references worth marking

- Luke 23:1-25 - Luke records the roles of Pilate, Herod, the chief priests, rulers, and people in the proceedings against Jesus.
- Acts 3:13-15 - Peter had already charged his hearers with delivering up and denying Jesus before Pilate.
- Acts 10:38 - Peter later describes God's anointing of Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and power.

Do not miss

- The connection to Psalm 2 is specific: nations and peoples, kings and rulers, gathered against God's Anointed. Israel's covenant identity did not make those opposing Jesus innocent.
- The verse identifies responsible participants in particular events. It neither assigns guilt to every individual Israelite nor makes later generations personally responsible for those actions.

Acts 4:28

For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

What does the passage say?

- The sentence begun in verse 27 continues. The opponents' actions fell within what God had determined beforehand.
- Jesus' death did not catch God unprepared or overturn His purpose.
- The same prayer describes the participants as acting against Jesus and their actions as unable to defeat God's counsel.

Words to notice

- **For to do** - To do; the older English construction continues the preceding sentence.
- **Thy hand** - God's effective power.
- **Thy counsel** - His deliberate purpose or plan.
- **Determined before** - Appointed beforehand. God's purpose preceded the gathering against Jesus.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 2:23 - Peter joins God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge with the responsibility of the wicked hands that crucified Jesus.
- Luke 22:22 - Jesus says His course is determined while pronouncing woe upon His betrayer.
- Genesis 50:20 - Joseph distinguishes his brothers' evil intention from God's good purpose in the same events.

Do not miss

- The rulers did not intend obedient service to God's plan. They gathered "against" His Anointed. God's determined purpose does not turn their hatred and injustice into righteousness.
- The verse concerns God's purpose in these events. It should not be expanded without argument into a claim that every human decision is involuntary.
- For the praying believers, the significance is immediate: the earlier gathering against Jesus failed to defeat God, so the present threats cannot make Him powerless.

Acts 4:29

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

What does the passage say?

- The prayer turns to the present danger.
- The believers place the threats before the Lord and ask Him to enable His servants to speak.
- Their request directly answers the council's command to be silent.

Words to notice

- **And now** - Connects the remembered Scripture and events with the situation confronting them.
- **Behold their threatenings** - Take notice of the threats and deal with them. They entrust the matter to God without specifying a punishment for the rulers.
- **Thy servants** - Their obligation belongs to the Lord whom they serve.

- **All boldness** - Open, confident speech despite opposition. Boldness concerns faithful testimony, not insulting language or a loud personality.
- **Thy word** - What they are commissioned to speak, rather than a message devised to avoid the council's objection.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 4:13, 18-20 - The rulers observed boldness, forbade the testimony, and heard the apostles' refusal to abandon their duty.
- Ephesians 6:18-20 - Paul later asks for prayer that he may speak boldly. The shared need for courage does not erase the distinct message and ministry identified in each passage.

Do not miss

- The prayer asks for courage to continue, not a guarantee that opposition will disappear.
- The believers' request does not make it wrong to ask for protection elsewhere. It shows their priority in this particular conflict: the word must still be spoken.

Acts 4:30

*By stretching forth thine hand to heal;
and that signs and wonders may be done
by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*

What does the passage say?

- The request continues from verse 29.
- The believers ask God to heal and work signs and wonders in Jesus' name.
- The desired signs belong alongside the testimony that the council wants stopped.

Words to notice

- **Stretching forth thine hand** - God's power actively at work. The hand associated with His determined purpose in verse 28 is now invoked for healing.
- **Signs and wonders** - Mighty works that attest the message and provoke attention; the healing in chapter 3 supplies the immediate example.

- **By the name** - Through Jesus' authority, not through power belonging independently to the speakers.
- **Thy holy child Jesus** - Repeats the description in verse 27. The One whom the rulers opposed is the One whose name they invoke.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 3:6, 12, 16 - The man was healed in Jesus' name; Peter denied that his own power or holiness caused it.
- Acts 5:12-16 - Luke subsequently records many signs and wonders through the apostles, including healings.

Do not miss

- The request for signs is part of the passage and should retain its full force within the apostolic Jerusalem witness.
- The passage does not transfer apostolic sign authority to every later reader. We can recognize God's power to heal without treating this specific request as a promise that every believer will reproduce these signs.

Acts 4:31

*And when they had prayed, the place was
shaken where they were assembled together;
and they were all filled with the
Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of
God with boldness.*

What does the passage say?

- After the prayer, the meeting place is shaken.
- All in the gathered company are filled with the Holy Ghost.
- They speak God's word with boldness, directly answering the request in verse 29.

Words to notice

- **When they had prayed** - Luke presents the event in immediate connection with the prayer.
- **The place was shaken** - A physical occurrence, not simply a description of their feelings. Luke does not identify the building.
- **They were all filled** - The statement concerns the gathered company. Peter has already been described as filled in verse 8, so filling here need not mean a first reception of the Spirit.

- **Spake ... with boldness** - The outcome matches what they asked for. The word forbidden by the council continues to be spoken.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 2:4 - The disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke with other tongues at Pentecost.
- Acts 4:8, 13, 29 - Peter's filling, the council's observation of boldness, and the company's request prepare for this answer.
- Acts 5:27-29 - Later opposition shows that bold witness continued without the removal of hostile authorities.

Do not miss

- Luke records bold speech here; he does not record tongues in this scene. Do not make every filling identical in its outward manifestations.
- The shaking accompanies the answer, but the speaking fulfills the specific request. A shaken building is not established as the required evidence of an effective prayer meeting.
- Verse 31 completes the movement begun in verse 23. The report of commanded silence ends with renewed speech.

Text And Translation Helps

- **Lord, thou art God (v. 24)** - The Textus Receptus includes *ho theos*, “God,” after “thou.” The SBL Greek New Testament omits that phrase there. Both texts have already said that the prayer is addressed to God; the variant does not change the identity of the One addressed. [Greek texts, Acts 4:24](#).
- **By the mouth of thy servant David (v. 25)** - The Textus Receptus has the shorter wording followed by the KJV. The SBL text additionally includes *tou patros hemon*, “of our father,” and *dia pneumatos hagiou*, “through the Holy Spirit.” The KJV still explicitly presents God as speaking through David. [Greek texts, Acts 4:25](#).
- **Holy child (vv. 27, 30)** - “Child” and “servant” represent different contextual renderings of *pais*, not a different Greek word in the manuscripts at this point. The KJV is not describing an infant Jesus.
- **In this city (v. 27)** - The SBL text includes *en te polei taute*, a phrase absent from the Textus Receptus and KJV. It explicitly locates the gathering in Jerusalem, already established by Luke’s narrative. [Greek texts, Acts 4:27](#).
- **For to do (v. 28)** - To do. Keep the sentence joined to verse 27.

Common Ideas To Test

- **“United prayer guarantees that the danger will end.”** The requested and recorded answer is bold witness. Hostile authorities remain active.
- **“Psalm 2 is only a general illustration of difficult times.”** The prayer identifies Jesus as the Anointed and names the parties gathered against Him. Its application is specific.
- **“Every part of Psalm 2 was completed at the crucifixion.”** The gathering against Christ is identified here; the psalm also announces His rule and judgment over the nations.
- **“God’s predetermined purpose made the opponents innocent.”** Acts 2:23 and Luke 22:22 retain human accountability alongside God’s determined purpose.
- **“Every filling of the Spirit must reproduce Pentecost’s signs.”** Acts 4:31 records filling and bold speech without recording tongues. Luke’s descriptions should govern the comparison.
- **“Right division makes the passage irrelevant today.”** God’s authority, the reliability of His word, and dependence upon Him remain instructive. Preserving the passage’s setting helps distinguish those truths from a claim to identical apostolic signs.

Session Summary

- Peter and John bring the rulers’ threats to their own company.
- The believers address the Creator and quote His word through David.
- Psalm 2 explains the gathering against Jesus by Gentile and Israelite participants.
- Their opposition did not overturn God’s determined purpose or remove their responsibility.
- The believers ask for boldness and confirming works in Jesus’ name.
- God answers, and the threatened testimony continues.

For Long-Term Study

Mark these themes as Acts unfolds

- Scripture quoted and then applied to named events and people.
- Jesus' name as the focus of opposition, healing, and witness.
- The relationship between God's purpose and human responsibility.
- The filling of the Holy Ghost and the particular result Luke records each time.

Questions to keep asking

1. How does beginning with the Creator affect the way the threats are viewed?
2. Which words connect Psalm 2:1-2 with Acts 4:27?

3. How can God's determined purpose and the opponents' guilt both be true?
4. What do the believers ask for, and what does verse 31 specifically record?
5. What can be learned from this prayer without claiming the apostles' distinctive sign authority?
6. Why is verse 31 a natural stopping point before the shared possessions and Barnabas account?

One sentence to remember

The Jerusalem believers place the rulers' threats before the Creator, understand the opposition through Psalm 2, and receive Spirit-given boldness to continue the witness the council forbade.