

**Introduction:**

- A. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our church could be instrumental in seeing more and more people come to know and love Jesus? Wouldn't it be wonderful to have bouquets of white roses? It would. It would.
- B. Illus.: Do you have recurring dreams? I do. A nightmare, actually. The most common is where I cannot get where I need to be. A whole bunch of people waiting for me to speak and I don't show up. I imagine them looking at their watches and glancing at the back door. But I can't find my way. It is always dark. I get turned around in dark hallways. Doors are locked. There's never anyone to ask. I get lost and its past time and my heart is pounding and *I just... can't... get... there!* I wake up sweating, muscles tight, incredibly frustrated at failing, at being so powerless.
- C. Christians have Christ's Great Commission: "*Go and make disciples of all nations.*" In Acts 1:8 Jesus told his disciples, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.*" But when it comes right down to it, at least here at VCL, getting there is a lot like my bad dream. *We just... can't... get... there!*
- D. Some of that is surely on us. We are often complacent about lost people around us. There are a lot of things that interest us more than being witnesses. But it isn't just that. In my dream, it's like there's **this unseen conspiracy** that silently blocks my way even though I never see anyone else. And that is exactly the problem the church faces. When it comes to being witnesses for Jesus Christ there is a dark, often unseen, sinister opposition and there is only one thing to be done about it. Only one way to defeat it.
- E. Turn to Acts 4. Last week we learned how the fledgling church hit a roadblock. Even though people were flocking

to believe in Jesus Christ, the Jewish authorities—the very men who had crucified Jesus less than two months before—called in Peter and John, the leading apostles, and told them to cease and desist. A gag order. No more preaching in Jesus' name or else! But Peter and John replied, *"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* And they went back and told the church. *How are we going to get where we need to go—to do what we need to do—when the way is blocked and the darkness is closing in?* That church prayed. **Because God opens doors in answer to the united prayer of his people.**

- F. In prayer, they laid claim to God's promise in Ps. 2 that no authorities in this world could stand "against the Lord and his anointed one." **They climbed to the top of that text like soldiers taking the high ground in battle.** Then they prayed, *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* I'm sure this is just the distillation of their many prayers. Scripture feeds faith, and the faith of some feeds the faith of all. They stood, hands in the air, pleading and praising; a crucible where dross was skimmed away and faith came out gold.
- G. And what happened when they prayed? Acts 4:31: *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken."* Wow! What did that mean? One thing it surely meant was that **God had been listening and he was about to act.** I get the feeling that the room shook because God pounded his fist and the furniture jumped! *Let's do it!*
- H. Our way is blocked. We cannot get to the lost people around us with the good news of Jesus. *We just... can't... get... there.* So what can we do? **We must pray together that God would open doors and give us boldness.** When we do, watch for three miracles.

V.31 continues, “*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*” Bravely. I don’t suppose these people were any bolder than you or me by nature. But God graced them with a *gift* of bold speech as they interacted with people around them. Let me state the obvious:

**I. WHEN WE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS GOD’S SPIRIT GIVES US BOLDNESS (4:31)**

- A. Illus.: When I think of boldness I think of my nephew Erik. When he was about 16 he suddenly got very fired up about Jesus, and Erik never does anything halfway. He’s also a semi-pro skateboarder, which should tell you something about his nerve. He’d stand out on Lake-Cook Rd. waving signs about Jesus. When he was a senior he wrote out his testimony and slid it into every locker at Buffalo Grove High School—which was not well received by the administration. Erik loves the word radical.

But boldness doesn’t always look like that. Illus.: A friend here at church took a couple friends to a Christian movie. Frankly, it wasn’t a very good movie—kind of preachy and clichéd—and it was awkward for all three. Afterwards they went out to eat and they had a good discussion. She told me, “*I took Amit’s approach, asking, ‘What do you believe?’ One atheist, one no-longer-Catholic, too intelligent to believe any more, and me, presently weak in faith and trying to act in obedience.*” She said they had a fascinating discussion and are going to meet again. So our friend is thinking through the questions they came up with and is asking for prayer that God would open doors to her friends. That was bold, too.

- B. When we pray for boldness God will give it to us in just the right way for the people he puts with us. Praying isn’t just saying to God, “*I promise to be bolder.*” It is *asking* God to give us *as a gift* the boldness we can’t on our own. He *loves* prayers like that! He *wants* to help us. **So we pray that God would enable us to be bold witnesses for Christ because that is a request he is glad to grant.**

God was not done answering their prayers. Boldness was going to have another language. **Vv.32-37...**

**II. WHEN WE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES US CHARISMATIC UNITY (4:32-37)**

- A. **V.32** says, *"All the believers were one in heart and mind."* They were taking on the characteristics of a battle-tested military unit—"a band of brothers." "All for one and one for all." **Pressure and prayer will do that for a church.** Three related things happened out of that unity.
- B. **V.32b:** *"No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."* The church had prayed in **v.30** that God would *"stretch out your hand and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* This sharing was just such a sign. This was **kingdom come**. Think about it: which takes more boldness—talking to a perfect stranger about Jesus or sharing everything you have? The thing is, this wasn't a command or a group decision. It just happened. God's grace was so great among them, this was just the natural thing to do. They were God's family.
- C. **V.33a:** *"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."* These were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. But when they went out they had a kind of secret sauce. The apostles were part of a church that was full of resurrected people—believers alive with the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. These were people living on the other side of the grave already. They were already experiencing the kingdom God had promised Israel. Our witness of the resurrected Christ is emboldened by our living kingdom fellowship here in a grace-filled church!
- D. **V.33b-34a:** *"And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them."* A more succinct translation is, *"Great grace was upon*

*them all.*” Grace is God’s free gift to us, of course; something undeserved, unearned, and unreachable on our own. And what was the evidence of God’s grace upon that church? What was God’s *gift* to them? He saved them from their sin, poured out his Spirit on them, made them one in heart and mind, and then atop all those gifts he gave them incredible generosity. **They were given grace to give away.** You might think, if you have no experience with these things, that the grace was given to the poor in the church who received funds, but that, of course, would be all wrong. Grace was given to both the *haves* and the *have-nots*. They *all* felt that God had given them a great gift—*great grace*—when “*there were no needy persons among them*”—for that is what Jesus has done for us.

- E. Such grace sweeping through a congregation is, in every sense of the word, charismatic. The word means *grace-filled*. It also signifies the life of the Holy Spirit. And in our common usage, it means unusually attractive and winsome. Charisma is that unseen wonderful quality that draws people—in this case, to the church of Jesus Christ. **Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this new Christian community.** *What got into those people!? I’d like to be part of a church that loves like that!* A congregation alive with great grace has a Christ-like charisma about it. Freeloaders are drawn to churches that give away money but lost people are drawn to those who are charismatic with God’s great grace.
- F. How did this all happen? Where did it start? It is the gift of God received by a praying church. If we pray together for a bold witness for Christ God will launch his grace from within us and among us. He will empower us with a kind of generosity that will astonish us and everyone else. Yet the gospel never impoverishes its agents. **2 Cor. 9:8...** So we pray together!

But all was not as it seemed. On the one hand we have Joseph: **vv.36-37**... There were over 5000 Christians by this time [4:4] but the apostles were so touched by the effect of Joseph's generosity that they gave him a nickname. **They didn't call him a Gold Level Donor. They called him Barnabas—Son of Encouragement**—a man so marked by God's grace it was like he had encouragement in his DNA. Later Acts tells us he became Paul's partner. But without him knowing it, this Son of Encouragement stirred up a terminal jealousy in a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. **5:1-11**... This, too, was part of God's answer to the church's prayer.

### **III. WHEN WE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS GOD'S SPIRIT FIERCELY PROTECTS US FROM THE SINS THAT COULD RUIN OUR WITNESS (5:1-11)**

- A. As you heard, their sin was their lie. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the apostles to recognize them, too. They wanted some new names, too. They wanted people to shake their hands and tell them what a blessing they had been. And they were willing to pay for it. For them, this was a half-off sale on status. That's a dangerous temptation, isn't it? Few things pose a greater threat to the work of God's grace than faking it. Do not fake a changed heart. They may have given half the proceeds of their land sale to the poor but they vandalized the grace of God.
- B. Look again at **vv.3**... *"Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart..."* Satan?! Where'd he come from? We've read of all this wonderful fellowship in the newborn church but Satan was roaming unseen among the new believers looking for heart-doors left open a crack to pride. And you can be sure that he is doing that here as well. Satan always slips into our lives in the shadow of pride.
- C. This story is stunning, the way it just pops up here. We've read four chapters of thrilling wonders and then—*whammo!*—two people drop dead under God's wrath. **This, too, is God's answer to prayer.** Here was a toxic sin in their midst that they could not detect. When Achan committed a similar sin in the book of Joshua the Israelite

army fell to an inglorious and unexpected defeat. The church was at risk of that, too, even though Ananias and Sapphira's sin wasn't known. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira would have spread like a contagion. There is something about hypocrisy in a church that is like a plague. **Their fake grace would have eventually impoverished the church and brought defeat at the hands of Satan.** Even holy boldness is no match for toxic hypocrisy.

- D. But the church had prayed and God was protecting them. How can we be protected from a lethal hypocrisy we cannot even see? We can pray that God would enable us to be bold witnesses. If our witness is threatened by and we are attentive to him, God will root it out.
- E. The consequence of all this is a paradox. Look again at **v.11**, "*Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*" It says that in v.5, too. Now read on: **vv.12-14**...What a paradox! People fearful of being amidst the believers because of God's judgment yet drawn to believe in the Lord Jesus.

The "great fear" set the brightness of the gospel against a dark background, the way a jeweler shows off a diamond. Lest anyone think the gospel is all sweetness and light, let this be a reminder that God is holy. God will not be lied to. He will not be played. The only reason we are safe in his presence is because Jesus died for our sins and we depend on him to make us acceptable to the holy God. God's holiness is a central part of our gospel message.

### Conclusion:

**We will never get where we're supposed to go as a church if we don't pray together for boldness.** It will be all blind alleys and frustration. But when we pray *together* to be bold witnesses God *gives* us boldness, he gives us a charismatic unity, and he fiercely protects us from the sins that could ruin our witness. And people will believe in the Lord and be saved. Wouldn't that be wonderful!

Will you pray on your own and with others that God would open doors and give us boldness? Growth Groups—by all means, pray for the concerns you each carry, but pray for open doors and for boldness. Come and pray with us tonight. Pray for yourself and pray for us all. God waits to pour out his grace upon us. God waits for us to want the wonderful.