

On this first weekend of a new year I wonder how many of you have New Year's resolutions, you have goals, you want something to be different this year? I hope that you do. When you think about it (New Year New Me) most New Year's resolutions are self-centred in nature. Not an entirely bad thing, just an observation. In other words, people might say I want to lose weight this year or I want to eat better this year or I want to keep my house cleaner this year or I want to get rid of our cats this year.

The tragedy though is so much of our life when it comes to God, is more about us than it is about him. For example, so many people today when it comes to God, are trying to get God to do what they want rather than trying to work out what God wants for their life. Sometimes it's a very self-centred thing. God bless me, God help me be richer, God help me be happier, God give me what I want. And whenever life doesn't go as we want, there are some people who end up blaming God. In other words, they might say, well you know I tried to go to church or I read my Bible or I did whatever. And I didn't get a better job and I didn't get a better parking space and did need that filling at the dentist. I tried God, it didn't work because God didn't do what I wanted him to do. What's interesting is that people think God exists for us when in reality, we exist to serve and to honour him. In fact, when Jesus invited people to follow him he said, (Matt 16:24) "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*"

If we want to be a disciple of Jesus, it's less about us and it's more about him. And that's why as we move into a new year, in the culture that we live in, a very self-centred, selfish culture, I want to spend four weeks that'll help us become selfless and more obedient to following Jesus. Because if we want to follow him, it's going to be less about us and more about him. So let me give you our big four themes so you'll know where we're going in the coming weeks. Today what I want to do is I want to talk about being bold in witness, bold in sharing our faith in Christ. I also want to talk about being faithful in service, using our gifts to minister to other people. We'll also talk about being extravagant in generosity. And we'll talk about being grateful in the grind.

Instead of being self-centred and selfish, what if we, as followers of Jesus, would strive to live a selfless life, starting off by denying ourselves and saying Jesus, we want what you want, we want to follow your will. So today, we're going to start with the big idea, one that I believe should spur us on to share the love of Jesus. And we're going to talk about **being bold in witness**. Let me give you the context of what we're going to talk about in scripture today. If you can imagine there were some disciples, some men that Jesus had been training and investing in for about three years. He's teaching them what it means to know God, teaching them how to do God's will. He's investing in them and the whole time Jesus is explaining to them, every now and then he'll say, "now you need to remember, the whole reason we're doing this is because one day I'm going to give my life", "I'm going to die, and then on the 3rd day God is going to raise me from the dead." The disciples had a really difficult time with this because they didn't really understand the whole context as we do today.

And so Jesus went to the cross, he suffered brutally, three days later, it's Sunday evening, What do you think the disciples are doing? Do you think they were out preaching boldly, "*He's coming back, he told us about this, we've been waiting for it. Any minute, here he comes, he's coming back.*" Not at all. John's gospel tell us what they were doing and we read it in John chapter 20, verse 19, that Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus told them he's

coming back. But what were they doing? They were cowering in fear behind locked doors. Why? Because they were afraid of those who were enemies of Christ. Why is it, those of you that are Christians, why is that we are not more often bold in witness? A lot of reasons. One reason is that we may be afraid we don't know enough. If we start to share our faith in Christ and someone asks us a question, we're like I don't know. Another reason is, we don't want to offend other people, we don't want to be pushy, we don't want to be that type of a Christian. In my opinion, if you get to the root of it, almost every excuse we have, the root of it is because we're afraid we're afraid. We're afraid we won't know enough. We're afraid we'll look silly. We're afraid that we won't get it right. We're afraid. We're behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish leaders. I totally and completely understand this. Just because I'm a minister doesn't mean I wake up every day and my Bible hovers over my desk and I glow in the dark with supernatural glory to be bold in all that I do. I totally get it.

Why is it that we're not more bold in spirit? For most of it's because we're so often afraid. But I want to show you in one additional verse of scripture, one event, one moment, that transformed these disciples from being timid and afraid of being bold and courageous. One event and one moment. That evening, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, suddenly Jesus, the man who died three days earlier, the man who was put into a tomb, Jesus, was standing there among them! I love what he said. "Peace be with you." But that's kinda cocky, like hey, did you forget I'm coming back? And all of a sudden these guys went from being selfish, being timid, being afraid, being self-centred, to bold, courageous and evangelistic in all that they did. These guys, who were in one moment, hiding behind locked doors, the next moment were out preaching boldly. Peter, who caved into a little girl and denied Jesus is now out preaching in front of all these people, "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sin." You couldn't shut this guy up. And the religious leaders arrested them, put them in jail and they're still preaching the way, even when they're being put in prison. Then the high priest, a guy named Annas, says, "You healed this guy. "By what power and in what name did you do this?" And here we see Peter, the guy who was hiding, the guy who just earlier denied Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, the text says, said to them, "*Rulers and elders of our people, are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.*" What was he doing? Because the tomb was empty, because Christ was risen, because he defeated death, hell and the grave, the very man who was timid in spirit was now bold and courageous because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What did we learn from this? That ***we speak boldly about what we believe deeply***. We all do this. Because Peter experienced the resurrection of Christ, this consumed him. Later on, he said we can't stop talking about this. It was everything to him. We all speak boldly about what we believe deeply, don't we? If you go to a great restaurant and it's amazing, what do you do? You tell everyone you meet. You describe the food in great detail. If you get like really comfortable shoes, like ah man I'm just walking, it's like I'm walking on air, they're just like the most comfortable shoes ever. And there's this new Netflix series you have to watch it. I mean I took off work for three days and I watched the whole three seasons, all in one. You know it's like this is amazing, because what do we do? We speak boldly about what we believe deeply. So, if we're not speaking boldly about our faith in Jesus, do we really believe it deeply? Do we really believe it deeply? Peter says let me tell you about the powerful name of Jesus. Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*"

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.*

They could see they were ordinary people with no special training in scripture, they also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. They were amazed by their boldness. Here's a question for you. Those of you who are Christians, how amazed are other people at your boldness for Christ? Think about it. How amazed are they? And let's go ahead and let's try to quantify this, best we can. On a scale of one to 10, one is unmoved, 10 is massively amazed, how amazed are they? What would you say for those of you that are probably, like legitimately a seven or an eight, let me help you know that you're there. You're probably not at church alone right now. You've probably got one or two or three people that you brought with you from your school or from the gym or from the place that you work, because you're always inviting people. Or perhaps, at least this week, you talked to three or four different people about faith in Christ and God was using you. Or, you've got a list of people every morning, I mean you're praying for your mom or you're praying for your brother-in-law, you're praying for three people that you work with, you've got names you're praying every single day. You've got a heart to share the good news with other people. You're probably a seven or an eight or maybe even a nine. How do you know if you're lower on the scale? That's probably pretty obvious. Never brought anybody to church at all. You know are you praying? You don't pray for other people. You know sharing your faith at work, you're not even sure if the people at that work even know you're a Christian. You're probably lower on the scale. How amazed are people by your boldness for Christ?

So that raises what I would consider to be a very important question. If you are a Jesus follower, we are called to go into all the world, we're called to be salt and light. This is a calling, this isn't just a suggestion, this is what we're supposed to do. How do we grow in our boldness? How do we become more bold in spirit? I'm going to give you just two real simple thoughts:

The first way we become bold is this: we very simply spend more time with Jesus. What does that mean? That means we're praying, we're listening to him, we're in communication, we're reading his word, we're spending time with Jesus. For example, look at verse 13 of Acts four. They were amazed by the disciples' boldness, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in scripture. One version says they were ordinary and unschooled men. There's a Greek word that's translated as unschooled and it's the word idiotas. Can you take a guess, what English word can also be translated from the word idiotas? It's the word idiot. If you've ever felt like an idiot, what I want you to understand is you are a perfect candidate for God to use. God specializes in using idiots who've been with Jesus. These were ordinary people. Just like you, just like me. No training in scripture, they also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. What happens when we're followers of Christ but we don't spend time with Jesus? Let me tell you what happens to me. I don't have any time with him in the morning, any time with him in the day, instead of being heavenly minded, I get consumed with everything in this world just like you do. Somebody cuts me off in traffic, I want to rear end them. I get angry, I get consumed with the things of this world like everybody else. And then the next day because I didn't have anything happen that was spiritual I don't feel like spending time with God because I skipped time with God. And all these negative spiritual consequences flow out of that. On the other hand, if, like I try to do almost every day, spend half an hour, 45 minutes reading my bible or YouVersion reading plan, letting God's word renew my mind, adjust my

attitudes away from my selfishness to a selfless attitude, where I pray and bring people before God and situations before God and I listen to God. When I walk out of my house what do I have? I've got divine confidence. God is with me, his spirit's going to guide me. Suddenly I feel bolder because I've been with him during the day. And so when I see an opportunity I recognize this is someone that God brought into my life for me to make a difference in their life. And so I might say something, I might give them something, I might do something that's to serve them and then I see how God might use it. And it increases my faith, and I become even more bold and so I do it again and again. And so the next day when I wake up I want to spend more time with Jesus because I've got spiritual, positive momentum going on in my life because I started the day with him. If you want to grow in boldness, it's very simple. Spend time with Jesus. They were amazed at the boldness and took note. They were ordinary, everyday people who had been with Jesus. What do we do to grow closer? Very simply we spend some time with him.

The 2nd thing that we can do is very, very simple, but I'm telling you God will hear and answer this prayer: Ask God to make you bold. God, give me boldness today, to share your goodness. When is the last time you asked God for boldness? You ask him and watch, he'll answer this prayer. And this is what had happened, religious leaders continued to threaten the disciples. They said we're going to put you in jail. Imagine if not only could you possibly go to jail for sharing your faith, but imagine if you could lose your life. When you go bold for your faith in Christ, in some countries, based on wherever you live, your family might turn on you or your life can literally be in danger. What if that was happening to us? Would we be scared to death, hiding behind the locked doors? What would we pray for? Oh dear God keep me safe today. God if I share, keep me safe God. You know protect me as I go to Grandma's house and don't let us get in a car wreck today when we're going to Grandma's house. God keep us safe. We pray for me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me. Watch what these disciples, under the potential threat of death, prayed for. Acts 4:29-30 *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.*

Not keep us safe. Not protect us today. But give us boldness, even though they're already threatening us God, make us even more bold in what we do. In fact, they went even further and asked God to perform miracles through them. When we spend time with Jesus, we grow in boldness. When we ask him for boldness, he helps strengthen our faith. And then we start to realign and realize and remember. And it's at the front of our mind when this life is over, people will live somewhere forever in eternity. They'll either live in the presence of God in heaven or in the horror of hell. I'll be honest, I've never been a big fan of what they call fire and brimstone preaching, where you try to scare everybody to death, but I cannot be true to scripture without telling you, there is a very real place that the Bible calls hell. It's called eternal damnation, it's called a place of torment, it's called the outer darkness. It's called a place of sorrow. There is indescribable suffering that happens day and night, eternally, in a place called hell. And words cannot convey the horror, the excruciation, the anguish of hell. In the same way, there is another place. And words cannot adequately convey the glory, the beauty, the splendour, the majesty of the dwelling place of God and his people in what the Bible calls heaven. Paul said this in 1st Corinthians 2:9, he said, "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.*" We can't even dream it up or explain it. It's so other worldly and glorious. John had a vision of heaven that is displayed in Revelation 21. He said this, he said, "I saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the old heaven and the old Earth had disappeared. I

heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people.' And God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes. And there'll be no more death or sorrow, crying or pain."

The glory of heaven that God has prepared for us. We speak boldly about what we believe deeply. A timid, fearful faith doesn't reach a lost and hurting and broken world. And what I want you to understand is there are people in your life that you love, who do not know the grace of Jesus. And at this moment it's not too late for them, this moment. One day, one day it will be too late. And so what we tend to think as we're hiding behind the doors. Well, what if I do this and I don't get it right? And what if I try and they say no? And what if, what if, what if, fear, fear, fear, fear. And what if I share my faith and they don't want to hear it? Another question we could ask ourselves that is perhaps more powerful is what if I don't? Remember this, in one moment the disciples were scared to death, but when they realized Jesus was risen, everything changed. For some of you, this is that moment. The tomb is empty and instead of being afraid, you want to be just like Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, you are an ordinary person, filled with the Holy Spirit. Courageous in faith and bold in witness, because we speak boldly about what we believe deeply. And we believe Jesus is the name above every name, who is soon returning, conquering King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the way, the truth and the light, the living water, the bread of life, our source, our saviour, the one who died and who rose again.