

Session 3



A Mission Met with Courage

THE POINT

God gives us courage to speak boldly about Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We're familiar with the cynical expression: "No good deed goes unpunished." That's not a biblical statement, but good deeds do occasionally get us into hot water.

Trying to fly home from Nigeria with a volunteer team, our luggage was being inspected by military personnel in the airport for anything we might have purchased in the country that they deemed "taxable." While our missionary work wasn't illegal in that country, we weren't trying to advertise why we were there. One of the officers, however, was quick to discern the purpose of our visit. She talked openly about her love for the Lord and invited our team members into her line where she began to expedite the inspection. Her superior, displeased by her actions, offered her a stern rebuke. Recognizing that I was the group leader, he then confronted me, requesting my passport. Upon handing it over, I was shocked to watch him place it in his pocket and walk away.

In Acts 4, Peter and John did a good deed that drew attention to Jesus Christ, and that got them in hot water with the religious leaders who opposed them. Their experience shows us how God gives us courage to stand strong in the face of adversity.

QUESTION 1:

What's the hardest time you've had just trying to get home?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ACTS 4:1-3

While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them,² because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.³ So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening.

God had used Peter and John to miraculously heal a lame man known by many. The crowd of people walking by the gate were astonished by the miracle. Seizing the opportunity, the disciples testified of God's power not only to heal the lame but, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, to forgive people of their sin. They needed only to turn from their wrongdoing and to Jesus, whom Peter and John declared to be the Messiah and the source of life. The message of the disciples not only created a stir among the people—as many were immediately convinced it was true—it also caused an uproar among the temple's religious leaders, who strongly objected to it.

Why was their message, considered wonderfully good news to so many in the crowd, adamantly rejected by the leaders? The priests, temple police, and Sadducees represented the upper class of wealthy Jews who, by and large, controlled the temple and its activities. The Sadducees are often referenced in contrast to the Pharisees, another dominant group in Jewish society, for their differences of belief and well-known theological debates and disagreements. The Pharisees were viewed as more middle-class as opposed to the upper-

class Sadducees. The Sadducees affirmed only the first five books of the Bible, known as the Torah, meaning “teaching” or “law.” One of the better-known theological distinctions among the two groups is that the Sadducees focused almost exclusively on the physical realities of life and rejected the idea of the eternal nature of the soul. Acts 23:8 states, “For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all.”

For Peter and John to stand at the temple gate proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and the culpability of the worshipers and their religious leaders in the crucifixion of the Messiah, would have been offensive to anyone unconvinced of the truth of their message. The powerful temple leaders were unconvinced. Instead of welcoming the good news from the disciples, “they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening.” (v. 3).

Sharing the gospel includes confronting people with their wrongdoing and wrong beliefs. That takes courage. Confronting powerful people with their wrongdoing and wrong beliefs takes even more courage because it can prove costly, as Peter and John experienced.

Thankfully, my experience in Nigeria didn't prove as costly, but the contrasting reactions to our volunteer mission team was similar to the reactions Peter and John observed. The Christian officer openly stated her love for missionaries and wanted to help us get on our way. Her superior officer didn't share that love, nor a belief in the message we had come to proclaim. After disappearing from the gate with my passport, he reappeared just as the agent issued the last call for passengers. Rather than ask about the good work our team had aspired to do among his people, the officer remarked that my flight was about to leave. He held my passport in one hand with his other hand resting on the weapon strapped across his shoulder. So, I expressed my love for the people of Nigeria, my appreciation for the hospitality of his country, and sadly had to pay a fee to get my passport back. Taking my passport from his extended hand, I rushed to the gate agent and walked onto the plane just as the door closed.

Whether sharing the gospel with a friend or family member, a stranger who intersects with our life, or those we might encounter on a mission trip overseas, we can never know how a person will react to Jesus's gospel until we share it. Like many in the crowd at the temple, some will be amazed and will joyfully repent and believe. Others will be indifferent. Some, like the leaders who confronted Peter and John, may be incensed. But unless those who have believed the good news have the courage to share it, no one else can accept it and experience the joy of forgiveness and salvation.

QUESTION 2:

In what ways might we face resistance when speaking about Jesus today?

ACTS 4:8-12

⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: ⁹ If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

After a night in custody, Peter and John were interrogated by the religious rulers and elders. What had they done wrong? Was it the healing or the preaching? Was it that they had confronted the people with their sin and called them to repent? Peter and John weren't wrong

in any of their claims, nor in their good deed for a man who had suffered a lifelong disability. They simply spoke the truth—truth that the religious leaders didn't believe and didn't want the people to hear. But even after a night in custody, the disciples would not be silenced.

Luke, the author of Acts, notes that “Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit” as he began to proclaim the truth about Jesus. Two things should be kept in mind. First, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the life of every born-again believer (John 14:17; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 4:30). Second, while the Holy Spirit abides with every believer, the Bible often references occasions when the Holy Spirit “fills” God’s people. There are times when the Holy Spirit is uniquely and powerfully at work in and through God’s people to accomplish God’s purposes (Luke 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52). For Peter, this moment was one of those times.

Stating his claims about Jesus once again, Peter boldly proclaimed: “Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy” (v. 10). The One responsible for the miracle was the same One these very leaders had conspired to have killed. And though they may have refused to believe in the afterlife, that One had been raised from the dead! Pointing to the prophetic words of Psalm 118:22, Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah and indicated the religious leaders were rejecting the only One in whose name salvation can be found.

The clarity of Peter’s message still rings true. In a Hindu temple in South Asia, I stood among

throng of people gathered to deposit offerings, chant, and to bow before and rub the feet of countless idols fashioned by human hands. My heart was broken by the devotion of people hungry to know God but unaware that God, through His Son, Jesus, draws near to them

Walking along the shores of the Ganges River at night, the glow of funeral pyres stretching as far as my eyes could see sent a shudder down my spine. Again, my heart was broken by the longing of people to find hope for their deceased loved ones and forgiveness for themselves, unaware that God, through Jesus, has paid the debt of sin and provided a way to eternal life.

Whether to the religious leaders of Peter’s day or the billions of people held captive by false religions in our day, the gospel of Jesus is good news. Peter’s declaration is an inescapable truth: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

QUESTION 3:

How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in sharing the gospel?

ACTS 4:19-20

¹⁹ Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰ for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Engage

FAITH OVER FEAR

Choose one of the following images that represents when you are most challenged to respond in faith instead of fear. Then write a prayer to God, asking Him for courage.



My Prayer:

I was in awe listening to the testimony of a friend who had spent more than a year incarcerated for sharing his faith in a closed country. Knowing the risks, he had obeyed God's call to minister among a people who had no access to the gospel. Eventually, he was taken into custody. Held in solitary confinement, he was regularly interrogated and abused.

He shared about how scared and lonely he had been during the first weeks of his imprisonment. As weeks turned into months, he began reciting Bible passages he had memorized, quietly singing worship songs he knew by heart, and whispering to God in prayer. He shared about the moment he came to realize God was in complete control of his situation and how, at that moment, everything changed.

Peter and John's incarceration only lasted for a night. But those responsible for their detention hadn't gone away. Motivated by their fear of the message the disciples had proclaimed, the religious leaders sought to bully the disciples into keeping silent. But the disciples chose to obey.

What does obeying the Lord look like for Christians today? First and foremost, obedience means what it has always meant: living according to the teachings of God's Word. Thankfully, God has blessed us with a set of written instructions regarding how we are to live as faithful disciples of Jesus. Among other things, Scripture teaches us to be generous, forgiving, compassionate, and to abstain from sexual sin, greed, and prejudice. God has called us to be active in a church—worshiping and serving with other believers. We're to follow Jesus's example by being baptized and obey His commission to make disciples. In these and other ways, we can live out the faith we profess through obedience.

Obedience also requires a willingness to endure the costs associated with obedience. Speaking openly about God's Word while gathered for Bible study or worship with other believers is one thing. Declaring God's Word to those who haven't heard or haven't believed is another. Sometimes the response isn't belief—it's rejection. In those moments, as it did for my missionary friend and for Peter and John, obedience to God means we continue to proclaim Christ, regardless of the cost.

When weighing the cost of obedience, the cost of disobedience should not be forgotten. Our disobedience hurts our fellowship with Jesus. It weakens our spiritual life and puts us in the position of needing God's discipline, which is always intended to bring about "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 6:5-12).

May we instead be "unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard," knowing that whatever the price of obedience, the price of disobedience is more than we can imagine.

QUESTION 4:

What are some ways we can prepare for times of opposition?

QUESTION 5:

What happens when we try to please people rather than God?

LIVE IT OUT

In a world that grows increasingly hostile to the gospel, the need for courage to boldly proclaim the gospel also grows. Choose one of the following activities:

- **Pray.** Ask God to give courage to missionaries and Christ followers who work and live in the midst of persecution. Pray they will share the gospel wisely but with boldness, and that God will give them fruit.
- **Investigate.** Spend time learning about unreached people groups around the world by visiting the website peoplegroups.org.
- **Commit.** Commit to sharing the gospel this week with someone you know has been unwilling to believe. Many who were hostile toward Jesus for years eventually heard the good news one more time and finally surrendered their lives to him.


