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UNSTOPPABLE COURAGE



*What's the most courageous act
you've ever seen?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLunstoppable

THE POINT

God gives us courage to speak boldly for Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Most of us were taught as kids to “think before you speak.” Sometimes, however, we need to speak even though we know our words will get us in trouble. That takes courage.

Consider Mathew Ayairga. The world reeled from the news in 2015 when 21 men from Egypt were kidnapped and beheaded because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Mathew was one of those kidnapped—but it turns out he was neither Egyptian nor a Christian. He just happened to be working in Libya with the other 20 men.

A transformation happened, though, on that fateful day. Kneeling on the beach with their executioners behind them, each man was commanded to renounce his faith, but each one died proclaiming Jesus Christ. When they came to Mathew and made the same demand, he said, “Their God is my God.”¹

Unstoppable courage. We see it first with Peter and John in Acts 4, and this unstoppable courage has continued on to others like Mathew Ayairga.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Acts 4:1-3

¹ Now as they were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, ² because they were provoked that they were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead, using Jesus as the example. ³ So they seized them and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening.

As we saw in Acts 3, the miraculous healing of a lame man opened the door for Peter and John to speak about Jesus. Peter seized that opportunity to preach the gospel.

This was a change for Peter. When Jesus was arrested and put on trial, Peter had fearfully denied Him three times (see Luke 22:54-62). But now Peter was demonstrating the courage that failed him in those hours. Peter the Petrified became Peter the Passionate and Fearless.

In addition, Peter demonstrated unstoppable courage in front of the very same people who had terrified him before. Even as he was preaching about the Jewish leaders who had put their Messiah to death and how God had raised Him from the dead, guess who showed up?

- ▶ **The priests.** These were the ones in charge of operating the temple.
- ▶ **The commander of the temple police.** This man was essentially the chief of police.
- ▶ **The Sadducees.** This socially and politically powerful sect in Jewish society didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead. Luke noted they were upset by all the resurrection talk (see v. 2).

What are the risks we face when we proclaim the gospel?

QUESTION #2

Jesus had said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Peter now stood in that power and declared the gospel message without apology.

The opposition Peter and John faced only showcased their courage. Courage is like a diamond on black velvet. It shines brightest against the darkest of circumstances. Courage always involves confrontation and the strong possibility of suffering. Courage is standing for Christ when you know you’ll pay a price for doing so.

For Peter and John, the price was trouble with the authorities and a night in jail. This came as no surprise. Jesus had told them, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

We can expect confrontation when we speak for Jesus. But we can’t let that silence us.

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 the Nazarene—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, and we must be saved by it.”

The Jewish religious leaders asked a single question of Peter and John: “By what power or in what name have you done this?” (v. 7) They wanted to know how the lame man had been healed.

Peter had only one answer: Jesus.

Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, about the stone rejected by the builders becoming a cornerstone—but he referred to “the stone rejected by *you builders*” (emphasis added). They had executed their own Messiah. Peter went one step further with the truth: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people, and we must be saved by it.”

PICTURING COURAGE

Which of the images below best represents your understanding of what it means to be courageous? Why?



When have you needed courage in order to speak boldly for Christ?

"I believe it is a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense to it."

—DOROTHY SAYERS

Today, about half of all Americans believe there is more than one way to get to heaven. Among the other half—those who believe there is only one way to heaven—not all of them necessarily believe Jesus is that way. But even in the church, a staggeringly high number of Christians believe Jesus is not the only way to salvation.²

To claim as Peter did that “there is salvation in no one else” is a slap in the face of all those sincere people doing good and seeking God in other ways. That’s intolerant!

Or is it? “Tolerance” should mean treating all people with respect, regardless of their beliefs. This definition has been altered, though, to mean accepting as *equally valid* all opinions and beliefs. It’s been twisted into a relativistic moral code that says: “Neither of our beliefs is better or worse, right or wrong. Just different.”

Biblical truth renounces this idea. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Among all the founders of the world’s major religions, Jesus alone claimed to be God (see 10:30; 14:10-11). Only Jesus asserted that He had come to lay down His life for the sins of the world (see Mark 10:45). His resurrection from death validated His claims (see Matt. 12:38-42).

Peter laid the truth on the line about Jesus. Far from being intolerant, he spoke the truth in love.

In a culture that values tolerance above all, how do we boldly and lovingly communicate the message of verse 12?

QUESTION #3

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

QUESTION #4

Acts 4:19-20

¹⁹ But 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.”

Some people just can’t admit they’re wrong. The religious leaders had in front of them a once-crippled man standing on two strong legs. They were looking at a miracle, yet their hearts remained hard. They couldn’t explain what Peter and John had accomplished, but they could make threats. By prohibiting Peter and John from speaking about Jesus (see v. 18), they were providing the basis to take further legal action should the apostles continue preaching the gospel.

Peter and John were ready with their courageous response: “We are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Christians today have an unhealthy need for others to like and approve of us. All too often, we are like the sign that reads: “I’m a recovering people pleaser—is that OK?” A healthy Christian outlook says:

- ▶ I don’t serve to be validated. I serve because I am validated.
- ▶ I don’t serve to be approved. I serve because I am approved.
- ▶ I don’t serve because I’m insecure. I serve because I’m secure in Christ.

God’s approval is all that matters. The opinions of others will come and go, but God’s love is unchanging and unconditional. We can stand unwaveringly with Him. Why? Because He stood for us, He died for us, and He lives again. We are His.

The unstoppable gospel calls for unstoppable courage.

Where is God directing your group to demonstrate a greater level of courage?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you demonstrate courage this week as you follow Christ? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Please God.** At the end of each day, evaluate your actions and attitudes by answering this question: “Whom did I live to please today?” Practice becoming a God-pleaser rather than a people-pleaser.
- ▶ **Read up.** Information is a great complement to courage. To better understand why Jesus is the only way to heaven, read *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* by Ravi Zacharias (W Publishing, 2002).
- ▶ **Take action.** Do some research and find a place in your community or state where the gospel is being silenced. Take action to get that policy changed: write to a government official, attend a public meeting and voice your opinion, start a petition, or join a group that works to correct the wrong.



Christians in America and other Western cultures are fortunate that we don't often find ourselves prohibited from sharing the gospel—nor do we find ourselves kneeling on a beach with guns pointed at us. Yet we can still demonstrate the unstoppable courage that has defined so many believers for so long. Will you?

My thoughts

1. http://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story_ID==373535
 2. <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2014/10/28/americans-believe-in-heaven-hell-and-a-little-bit-of-heresy>.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLunstoppable**