



SESSION 5

UNSTOPPABLE COURAGE

▶ **The Point**

God gives us courage to speak boldly for Christ.

▶ **The Passage**

Acts 4:1-3,8-12,19-20

▶ **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.”⁹

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.

▶ **The Setting**

Peter and John had healed a lame beggar on their way to the Jerusalem temple at the afternoon hour of prayer. Peter used the opportunity to preach the gospel to those present in the temple. The Jewish religious leaders were offended by Peter and John’s teaching the people in the temple and proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. They arrested Peter and John, bringing them before the assembled Jewish leadership to answer for their words and actions.

What does the Bible say?

Sadducees (v. 1)—The Sadducees were the priestly party in charge of the temple, were supporters of Rome, and accepted only the first five Old Testament books as authoritative.

Cornerstone (v. 11)—The Greek words translated *cornerstone* are literally “head of a corner” and can refer to the first stone or to the final stone in a building project.

Acts 4:1-3,8-12,19-20

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.

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.”

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.”

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 99 of the PSG: **“What’s the most courageous act you’ve ever seen?”**

Note: Remind group members that courage is not limited to physical heroics or violent situations. Encourage them to consider acts that demonstrated moral courage, emotional courage, relational courage, and so on.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Provide a visual supplement to Question #1 by

playing one or more video clips of people doing something courageous. These clips could include fictional stories from movies and television, or real-life events from news broadcasts and eyewitness recordings.

Note: To the best of your ability, be sure to choose video clips that will not be offensive or dismaying to your group members. Especially avoid clips that portray a high degree of physical violence or injuries. (Remember, courage is not limited to physical acts of heroism.)

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 100 of the PSG. Continue the topic of unstoppable courage by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 100 of the PSG: **“God gives us courage to speak boldly for Christ.”**

PRAY: Transition into the discussion by acknowledging that our ability to demonstrate courage is a gift from God. Thank God for the opportunity to learn more about the gift of courage as your group engages His Word.

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Acts 4:1-3 Commentary

[Verse 1] After healing the lame man outside the temple complex, Peter and John went with him into the temple complex. As Peter and John spoke to the crowd, **the priests, the commander of the temple police, and the Sadducees** confronted the apostles. *The priests* likely were those serving at the temple and carrying out the sacrifices that afternoon. *The commander of the temple police* was himself a priest and was second in charge behind the high priest. The commander and his officers (chosen from among the Levites) oversaw the temple environs—keeping order and protecting property—and had the authority to make arrests. *The Sadducees* were one of the major influential Jewish parties in the first century. They held only the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis–Deuteronomy) to be authoritative, did not believe in angels or demons, and rejected the teachings about resurrection and life after death. They were also largely in charge of the temple in Jerusalem.

[Verse 2] Apparently it was not the healing that concerned the Sadducees. What had **provoked** or frustrated them was the apostles' **teaching** about **the resurrection from the dead**. The death and resurrection of **Jesus** was the primary emphasis of the apostles' preaching. After the crowd had gathered around them in the temple that morning, Peter focused on Jesus as the Messiah and said to the people, "You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this" (Acts 3:15). The idea of a resurrection, especially connected to Jesus, was what really concerned the Sadducees. In their minds, too many people believed in Jesus as the Messiah. The focus of messianic thought and teaching in that day was on the restoration of Israel. But essential for this restoration was rebellion against the ruling nation of Rome. And if Rome moved against Jerusalem or the nation of Israel as a whole, everything the Sadducees enjoyed—especially their status, influence, and wealth—could have been taken away from them. Primarily because of their self-interests, they sought to suppress any messianic teaching and put a stop to anyone who might have been viewed as a potential messiah.

Related to those concerns, the fact that Peter and John were **teaching the people** also appears to have been a major frustration. The Sadducees believed they alone had the responsibility and authority to teach and interpret the Scriptures. The Sadducees most likely disliked that these followers of Jesus were not only teaching a faulty doctrine (in their thinking), but also were doing it in the temple, where the Sadducees felt they alone had authority.

[Verse 3] Thus, the Sadducees **seized** (or arrested) the apostles (and perhaps the lame man as well) and **put them in custody**. Because it was **already evening**, it was too late to bring a case against the men or to question them about their actions. Peter and John would spend the night in jail (or some type of holding facility) until the Jewish religious council, the Sanhedrin, could convene **the next day**.

Acts 4:8-12 Commentary

[Verses 8-9] The Sadducees brought Peter and John before the council the next day. They questioned them, demanding to know “by what power or in what name have you done this?” (v. 7). Peter and John responded to the council’s question with extraordinary courage. Luke notes that **Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit**. He called into question the reason for which he and John were **being examined**. Were the apostles being questioned because they had done **a good deed**? Had the council arrested them because a **disabled man** had been **healed**?

[Verse 10] Peter then restated what he had explained the previous day to the crowd in the temple. He wanted the men on the council, as well as **all the people of Israel**, to know that the lame man’s healing had happened **by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene**. *Jesus’ name* denotes everything about Him—His divine identity, authority, and power. He was more than just a carpenter from Nazareth. He was, in fact, the *Christ*—that is, the Messiah. Next, Peter wasted no time moving from who Jesus is to what the Jewish leaders had done. Many of the men on that council had felt threatened by Jesus during His years of ministry. Thus, they condemned Him to death and turned Him over to the Romans to be **crucified**. But **God raised Jesus from the dead**. Peter was clear in his emphasis on the resurrection of the dead. Despite the Sadducees’ rejection of this doctrine, they could not refute the truth.

Apparently, the man who just the day before had been unable to walk was also in the hearing with Peter and John. Peter noted, **“this man is standing here before you.”** Peter pointed out that the man in their presence was now **healthy**, and his healing came through the name of Jesus Christ.

[Verse 11] Peter didn’t quote Psalm 118:22 verbatim, but used its words to emphasize the failed responsibility of the rulers and elders. Jewish religious literature actually referred to teachers of the law and community leaders as **builders**. They were responsible to God for building up the house of Israel—guiding the people to grow in relation to God and to others. The **cornerstone** is the first stone set for a building’s foundation. All other stones are placed in relation to it. If the cornerstone is faulty, then the rest of the foundation will be faulty as well. If the builders—the Jewish religious leaders—had truly known God and been humbly dependent on Him, they would have recognized the **stone** He provided in **Jesus**. Instead, the leaders **rejected** Him. Despite the leaders’ defiant rejection of Jesus as Messiah, God made Him the standard on which everything would be based in God’s kingdom.

[Verse 12] Peter clearly emphasized the truth about Jesus—He alone brings **salvation**. Through salvation in Jesus Christ, a person is restored to a right relationship with God, is freed from the power of sin and death, and receives the gift of eternal life.

Acts 4:19-20 Commentary

[Verse 19] After their initial interrogations, the council dismissed the apostles and the healed man from the room (see Acts 4:13-15). They talked among themselves about the best thing to do. Apparently, they gave no thought to believing the apostles' words about Jesus. The best they could do was try to keep the message from spreading. They decided to threaten the apostles and forbid them from preaching or teaching in Jesus' name. So, they called the men back into the courtroom and delivered their decision (see vv. 16-18).

The apostles' undaunted response should have been no surprise to the assembly, given the boldness with which both men had previously spoken. Peter and John challenged the religious leaders to **decide** for themselves what was **right in the sight of God**. It didn't matter what the religious leaders thought was right. Peter and John's concern was for what God says is right. The apostles' response was defiant, asking the leaders whose words should have priority in their lives: the Sanhedrin's or God's?

[Verse 20] Despite the council's demand, Peter and John could not comply with it. The men clarified that they were **unable to stop speaking**, which was almost a double negative with the sense that "we cannot not speak." They were compelled by their experience with Jesus and His commission to them. To communicate to others what they had **seen and heard** as His witnesses was now their primary purpose in life, and they were determined to fulfill it.

They had likely considered the potential consequences of their disobedience to the religious leaders, but it did not matter to them. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old (see Dan. 3:1-30), they were resolved to trust God and do His will no matter the cost.



A previous *Biblical Illustrator* article titled "The Sanhedrin, Their History and Function" (Summer 2008) contains material relating to this lesson. It can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.

