

Courage to Proclaim the Good News

Acts 4:1-22

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Ever wonder what keeps believers from obeying the Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20)? For many Christians the mere thought of going outside of the “sacred halls” of their church terrifies their souls for did not Jesus promise that since the world hated Him they would hate and persecute us as well (John 15:18-25)? While proclaiming the Good News today will unlikely result in physical harm or martyrdom, is it not just as terrifying knowing that telling people about Jesus will result in receiving the many psychological wounds that comes from being called a narrow-minded bigot and having many relationships with loved ones, family and colleagues disintegrated (Matthew 10:34-42)? And do not many believers choose to not lend their voice of witness for who could ever find the right words to say to this hostile world that would even begin to penetrate their stone, cold hearts? In the following sermon we are going to examine Peter and John’s successful evangelism in Acts 4:1-22 and conclude that through the power of the Holy Spirit ordinary Christians are to have courage that they can overcome their Sanhedrin and effectively profess that salvation is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Arrest of Peter and John (1-4)

“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.”

After having healed the ankles and feet of a man in the name of the resurrected Christ (3:12-26) at the temple, Peter and John’s proclaiming the Good News was suddenly interrupted by some very hostile Jewish officials.¹ While the temple guard was concerned that the large crowd around the disciples might incite a riot,² it was the apostles teaching concerning a risen Christ that offended and scared them most! Most of the officials were from the Sadducee

¹ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:1.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 89.



party,³ descendants of the Hasmoneans who believed the Messianic Age had already come⁴ and felt that they alone were qualified to instruct on spiritual matters.⁵ They felt they were to act as guardians of a literal interpretation of the Old Testament Law⁶ that in their minds did not include belief in angels, demons or the resurrection of the dead. Because the apostles teaching could be “politically, socially, and religiously destabilizing to the relatively good relationship with Rome,”⁷ of whom they got their power,⁸ the Sadducees

believed something drastic needed to be done to the apostles. Also, since more than two thousand men became believers upon hearing the apostles message concerning a risen Christ,⁹ in their desire to “nip this teaching in the bud”¹⁰ the temple guard had the apostles arrested but since it was evening they put them in prison until morning to be tried.¹¹ Maybe their night in prison and fear of facing the dreaded Sanhedrin in the morning might scare them¹² into relinquishing Jesus’ command to spread the Gospel message? This event marks the beginning of a pattern of persecution against the church that only intensifies throughout the book of Acts.¹³

³ Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 301.

⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 301.

⁵ William J. Larkin Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:1.

⁶ David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 78.

⁷ David G. Peterson, [The Acts of the Apostles](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 187.

⁸ David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 77.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, [The Book of the Acts](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 90.

¹⁰ David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 79.

¹¹ Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 302.

¹² I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 104–105.

¹³ D. A. Carson, [“The Gospels and Acts.”](#) in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1959.

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (5-12)

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them



and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know

this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone." ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

The next morning the rulers or chief priests, elders, and scribes¹⁴ of the "highest legislative and judicial body in Israel,"¹⁵ called the Sanhedrin, brought the apostles before them to be questioned. While it is unlikely all 71 members of this council¹⁶ could have convened at such short notice,¹⁷ facing a semicircle¹⁸ of mostly the Sadducees of the same council¹⁹ that

¹⁴ Lee Martin McDonald, "[Acts](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 39.

¹⁵ William J. Larkin Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:1.

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, "[The Gospels and Acts](#)," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1959.

¹⁷ David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 80.

¹⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, "[The Acts of the Apostles](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 303.

¹⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, "[The Acts of the Apostles](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 302.

tried and condemned Jesus²⁰ just a few weeks ago²¹ to face similar charges of blasphemy,²² would have been very intimidating! Furthermore, being questioned by the president of the council Annas,²³ who had a rash temper and was known to be heartless in his judgments,²⁴ would mean choosing one's responses with great care! Like the question asked of Jesus in Luke 20:2, Annas sarcastically²⁵ asks "by what power or what name did you do this" (healing of the lame man)?²⁶ Being filled by the Holy Spirit²⁷ and given the promised²⁸ "right" words to say (Luke 21:12-15),²⁹ Peter goes from a defensive to an attacking position³⁰ and uses the word Greek word *sōzō*³¹ which in a play on words implied the healing of the man but also by quoting Psalms 118:22³² implied the only way to obtain eternal salvation was through faith³³ in the very same Jesus they had rejected and crucified! Even though the Sadducees might have wished to debate resurrection, with the man standing there and living proof that Christ was the key to healing, many in the crowd believed Jesus was the prophesied,³⁴ Messianic cornerstone and the only way that humanity could be cleansed from the "guilt of sin and judgment to come" and join the family of God!³⁵

²⁰ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 189.

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 92.

²² David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 190.

²³ David J. Williams, *Acts*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 80.

²⁴ Lee Martin McDonald, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 39–40.

²⁵ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:8.

²⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 190.

²⁷ Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost. This verse does not mean a second filling but rather an acute awareness of words to speak from the Spirit.

²⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 303.

²⁹ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 152.

³⁰ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 152.

³¹ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:8.

³² William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:8.

³³ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:8.

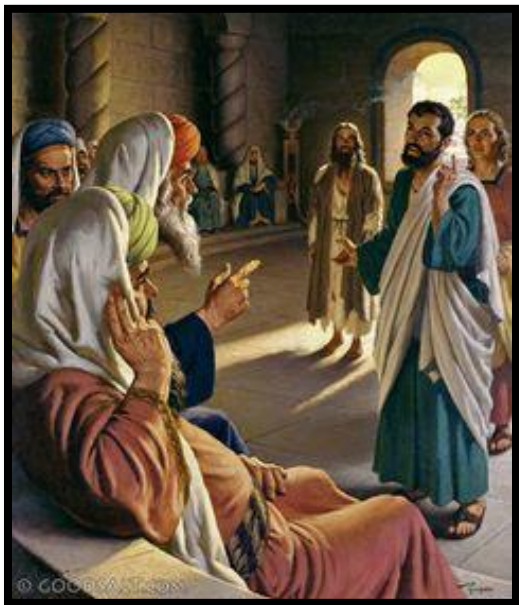
³⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 305.

³⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 93–94.

Debate in the Sanhedrin (13-17)

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. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

The initial response of the Sadducees was astonishment that such unschooled, ordinary



men had the courage to speak to them like Christ (Mark 1:22), as one’s having authority concerning God’s word!³⁶ The Sanhedrin must have wondered how “laymen,”³⁷ having received no rabbinical education³⁸ or knowledge of “Greek rhetoric and public speaking”³⁹ could courageously and with “unashamedness”⁴⁰ speak to them with such eloquence and sophistication on theological matters⁴¹ concerning the Torah and Jewish law?⁴² With the once crippled man “standing” in front of them as irrefutable proof of Christ’s authority to heal,⁴³ the Sanhedrin were at a loss on how to handle the “Good News” of the apostles preaching so they ordered them to leave their presence to discuss the matter privately. Even though they had the power to punish the apostles, due to them not

³⁶ Ajith Fernando, [Acts](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 153.

³⁷ William J. Larkin Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:8.

³⁸ Ajith Fernando, [Acts](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 153.

³⁹ Lee Martin McDonald, “[Acts](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Buebeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 41.

⁴⁰ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 107.

⁴¹ Richard N. Longenecker, “[The Acts of the Apostles](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 306.

⁴² I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 107.

⁴³ David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 84.

having broken any law⁴⁴ and their fear of the public who were praising God⁴⁵ for the miracle might go against them,⁴⁶ the council ordered the apostles to “speak no longer to anyone in His name” (verse 17) so that they might create the basis of future “judicial proceedings against the apostles.”⁴⁷ Even though Jesus’ teachings were affirmed with miraculous powers⁴⁸ and they had heard the Spirit inspired, eloquent words of these “ordinary men,”⁴⁹ the Sanhedrin refused to acknowledge the “dawn of the age of salvation in Jesus had come!”⁵⁰

Apostles Dismissed with a Caution (18-22)

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”

If the Sanhedrin thought their command to not speak in the name of Jesus was going to be effective, they were sadly disillusioned.⁵¹ In an act of clear defiance, like Socrates statement to the Men of Athens,⁵² Peter and John told the council they would obey God rather than man! Those who were witnesses to the risen Christ⁵³ would continue to fulfill His mandate of the Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20) as

⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 95.

⁴⁵ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 153.

⁴⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 193–194.

⁴⁷ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:15.

⁴⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, “[The Acts of the Apostles](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 306.

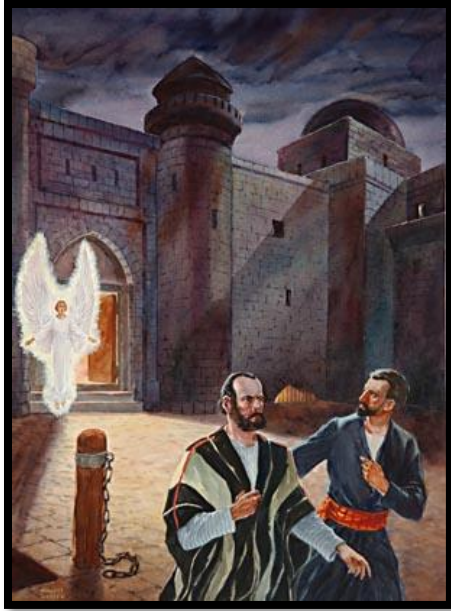
⁴⁹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 195.

⁵⁰ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:15.

⁵¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 96.

⁵² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 109.

⁵³ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 109.



“eyewitnesses of these salvation truths (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8; 3:15; 2 Pet 1:16–18).⁵⁴ “As in the prophets of old, God’s word was in Peter and John’s hearts like a burning fire; and they could neither contain it nor be constrained from speaking (cf. Jer 20:9).⁵⁵ For the apostles “God’s authority was vested in the civic rulers of Israel,”⁵⁶ only when they spoke in accordance with His divine will! Obedience to God “stands above the commands of any religious or political system”⁵⁷ which later apostle Paul reiterated in his letter to Rome (13:1-7). Since the Sanhedrin felt the crowds would not tolerate “more drastic sanctions at this stage,”⁵⁸ the most they could do is merely warn the apostle to not speak in Jesus’ name which set in motion a legal precedent that “would enable the council to take, if necessary, more drastic action in the future.”⁵⁹

Implications for Evangelism Today

As Christ’s ambassador’s and royal priests (2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 2:10), like Peter and John are we not also called to both proclaim and live the Gospel message to the world



(Matthew 28:19-20)? Are we not also called to not hide the glorious light that we have received from Jesus under a bushel (Matthew 5:15-16) of fear or complacency but instead to go and preach the Good News to all nations? And even if one has not been given the gift of evangelism (1 Corinthians 12), are we not to be ready to give reasons why we have hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15)? Also, are we not called to

⁵⁴ William J. Larkin Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 5, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), Ac 4:15.

⁵⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 307.

⁵⁶ David G. Peterson, [The Acts of the Apostles](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 196.

⁵⁷ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 109.

⁵⁸ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 108.

⁵⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 307.

demonstrate we are Christians though our good deeds that point to God the Father in heaven; after all, there still exists many a stranger that is thirsty, hungry, without clothing (Matthew 25:40-46) and worst yet blind, death and without understanding (Matthew 13:15)! Surely those who have born again from death to life have contained within their hearts a burning fire to plant seeds of righteousness in the furrows of the stone cold hearts of this world with the glorious hope that He who saved a wretch like me can save them as well (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10)!

Since we too are called to proclaim both in word and deed the Gospel message one cannot help but wonder what are our Sanhedrin that are stopping us from doing so? For some it is the fear of not knowing what to say in the face of the stone-cold wanderers of this world. Like the disciples we are to trust that the Spirit will give us the “ordinary” the right words to say that will plant seeds of righteousness in the hearts of even strangers. While a prior relationship



with a person helps when evangelizing, like the apostles who reached over 2,000 people most of which they did not know, only having the Spirit is the true prerequisite to spreading seeds. For others, their Sanhedrin is the fear of being persecuted but since God is for us (Romans 8:31-38) not even the devil who roars like a lion (1 Peter 5:8) can stand against those who stand firmly on the Rock of their salvation (Psalms 18:2)! Truly the most common and powerful Sanhedrin we face is complacency and the love of self. To

stay within the confines of the church where people are likeminded (1 Peter 3:8) and of the same body (1 Corinthians 12:7) for one hour a week is simply far easier but not obedient to, He who bought us at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). So, let me leave you with this challenge. Like apostle Paul bring your Sanhedrin to the cross to be crucified so that in doing so you might be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:19-21) and like Peter and John freed to share every spiritual blessing you have received from Christ with the world. Let us embrace the truth found in Acts 4:1-22 that through the power of the Holy Spirit ordinary Christians are to have courage that they can overcome their Sanhedrin and effectively profess that salvation is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ.