

## ACTS 4:1-22

---

### PRELIMINARY REMARKS

- What comes to your mind when you think of courage?
  - Maybe a kid who stands up to the class bully.
  - Or a loved one who's fighting cancer.
  - Or a soldier on the battlefield.
- Courage comes in many forms—each one is beautiful.
- And our passage today points us to a particular kind of courage—what I'm calling gospel courage.
- It's like the courage we see in the world—but I also want us to see that it's different.
  - We need it for different reasons.
  - It looks slightly different.
  - And it comes from a different source.
- Let's open Acts 4 and see if it can give us more courage. **[Read. Pray.]**

### INTRODUCTION

- Polycarp was a pastor who lived in the second century.
- He was an old man when severe persecution broke out in the Roman Empire.
- Soon, he was arrested because he refused to deny Christ.
- His friends begged him to run, but Polycarp said: *"God's will be done."*
- He was dragged before the Roman governor, who said, *"Respect your age. Deny Christ, and I'll release you."*
- But Polycarp replied: *"Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my king who saved me."*
- Facing the flames, Polycarp chose to obey God, not men—that's gospel courage.

**[Transition]:** The disciples had it, too.

### CONTEXT

- Last week, in **Acts 3**, Peter healed a man who had never walked.
  - Joints strengthened, muscles formed—and he went walking and leaping and praising God.
  - The crowd was amazed. But the religious leaders were alarmed.

- So now—in **Acts 4**—Peter and John are arrested and warned: *No more speaking in the name of Jesus!*
  - In response, these disciples have gospel courage—which is summed up in **VV19-20**: Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge. <sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”
  - Gospel courage is the resolve to obey God rather than men.
    - It’s not the absence of fear—if you weren’t afraid, you wouldn’t need it!
    - Instead, it’s a faith-filled determination to be found on God’s side.

### [Transition]

- And it’s not just for the pages of history—Peter, John, Polycarp—it’s for today:
  - It’s for **students** who walk into classrooms where faith feels strange.
  - It’s for **parents** who raise kids in a confusing age.
  - And it’s for **all believers** who face the quiet pressure to compromise.
- Let grow in gospel courage by seeing:
  - 1) Why we need it.
  - 2) What it looks like.
  - 3) How we get it.

## 1. WHY WE NEED IT

### [State]: Why do we need gospel courage?

- As we’ve seen in the book of Acts, Jesus has given us a mission: **Be my witnesses.**
  - Go tell the world there’s a new king, and life in his kingdom is beautiful.
    - Forgiveness for your past.
    - Purpose and joy for your present.
    - And hope for the life to come.
  - It’s good news—but witnessing to it—telling others about it—requires courage. WHY?
- Bc this good news—this gospel—makes an exclusive claim.
  - Do you see it in **V12**? **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**
    - Jesus is not **a** king—he is **the** king.
    - And Jesus is not **one** way to be saved—he is the **only** way to be saved.
  - Jesus said the same thing himself:
    - **I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6).**
    - Now Peter repeats his teaching here.

### [Illustrate]

- It's important to remember that this teaching wasn't popular **then**.
  - Among the **religious leaders**—who crucified Jesus.
  - Or in the **broader culture**—which believed there were many ways to God.
    - A pantheon of options was worshipped in the Roman world.
    - And you could pick any god you wanted—as long as you also sacrificed to Caesar.
- And of course this exclusive claim—that Jesus is the only way—isn't popular **today**.
  - In our **culture**:
    - You can have any truth you want—as long as you recognize that it's *your* truth.
    - The only rule is that you can't tell anyone else what they should believe.
  - Even here though, notice how our culture is **inconsistent**:
    - People who say you can't tell anyone what they should believe—are doing what? Telling you what you should believe.
    - And some will go farther to insist that there are a host of issues on which you must believe exactly what they believe.
      - Sexual ethics, gender identity, or the sanctity of life...
      - If you hold biblical views on these things, you might be labeled a bigot, intolerant, or worse.
  - There's also a version of this inconsistency in the **church**:
    - Yes, Jesus is the only way to be saved...
    - But to be a real Xn—you must agree with us on baptism, or speaking in tongues, or vote for the candidates we do.
  - It turns out that many people—secular and religious—make exclusive truth claims.
    - But if you make them about Jesus—it's likely to be unpopular.
    - It was in Peter's day, and it still is now.

### [Apply]

- Which means, if we want to be witnesses for Jesus—we'll need gospel courage.
  - We can't be faithful to the gospel without insisting—as Jesus did—that he is the only way to heaven.
  - It might be unpopular but—if we want to be witnesses—we must resolve to obey God rather than men.
- When we think about this *unpopularity*:
  - On one hand: I'd encourage us not to feel too sorry for ourselves about it.
    - Every generation of believers has faced these pressures.
    - And honestly, we've got it pretty good—we're unlikely to be arrested or beaten or killed—like the first disciples and many believers today around the world.

- On the other hand: We do need to recognize the cost.
  - With your classmates and friends, your coworkers or boss—socially or professionally—this might be hard.
  - Let’s not be too afraid of that... the challenge is small compared to the joy of following Christ.

**[Transition]**

- Why do we need gospel courage? To be witnesses for Jesus.
- But what does that kind of courage look like? Not courage in general—but gospel courage?

**2. WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE**

**[State]: What does gospel courage look like?**

- In this passage, Peter embodies it by speaking the truth in love.
  - 1) First, gospel courage speaks **truth**.
    - Peter is clear and direct in **VV8-12**: You’re asking us how this man was healed? Here’s the answer: In the name of Jesus.
    - And again in **VV19-20**: You can have your own opinion on whether we should obey you or God, but we won’t stop speaking about Jesus.
      - He doesn’t pull punches. He doesn’t water anything down.
      - That’s gospel courage: truth, clarity, conviction.
  - 2) But notice, too, that Peter speaks this truth in **love**.
    - Peter was only asked by what power the man was healed—yet he takes it as an opportunity to present the gospel!
      - **V10**: You crucified Jesus. But God raised him from the dead.
      - And now **V12**: There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
    - Don’t you love the “we”?
      - “They” aren’t the only ones who need a Savior.
        - Peter knows he needs one just as much as them—remember just a few weeks ago he denied Jesus 3x.
        - When it comes to who needs Jesus, there is no “them”—there’s only “we.”
      - And so their questioning of him becomes his appeal to them.
        - He answers their question—but then he directs the conversation to the things that matter most.
        - That’s gospel courage: compassion, humility, love.

### [Illustrate]

- I had lunch with one of our deacons last week, and he said something remarkable:  
**When I call people enemies; God calls them my mission field.**
- That's been living in my head rent free:
  - Are there things about "their" lives that are displeasing to God? Wait till you hear about the list of things in my life.
  - Are there things about "their" worldview that are inconsistent? Wait till you hear how inconsistent I am in living out my faith.
  - God, give me your eyes to see, the same eyes with which you see me, and give me the opportunity to speak of Jesus who saves not "them" but "we."

### [Apply]

- Here's the challenge, friends.
  - We live in a polarized, divided, angry world.
  - Too often Xns try to fight the fight of faith with the world's weapons—more polarization, more division, more anger.
  - Gospel courage isn't like that:
    - It's not arrogant or brash.
    - It's not about asserting your dominance or intimidating others.
    - Don't be a Christian with soft thinking and a hard heart!
- The way we witness must be consistent with the message—and since that message is about Jesus—we speak the **truth in love**.
  - We have **conviction**—we're clear, honest, and direct. Have steel in your spine and iron in your gut.
  - And we have **compassion**—humility, tenderness, and grace. A heart that longs for others to be saved.
- We're not just trying to win an argument or get people's behavior to change.
  - We're not content to see people agree with us on any hot-button issue while they march their way to hell.
  - Instead, we are witnesses to Christ—who look to share the gospel that has saved us and can save others as well.
- Here are two questions we can all ask before we post on social media, engage with friends, or even seek to disciple our kids:
  - Am I speaking the truth in love?
  - Am I pointing to Christ?
- That's what gospel courage looks like.

### [Transition]

- Why do we need gospel courage? To witness for Jesus.
- What does it look like? Speaking the truth in love.
- Lastly, how do we get it?!!

### 3. HOW WE GET IT

#### [State]: How do we get gospel courage? Where does it come from?

- The first thing to note, is that we don't find it in ourselves.
  - Look at **V13**: The religious leaders see the boldness of Peter and John, and are astonished bc they are **uneducated, common men**.
    - The Greek word for "common" is *idiotes*—where we get the English word *idiot*.
    - That's kind of funny, right?!
  - There was nothing impressive or naturally courageous about these guys!
    - So don't feel bad if you're the same.
    - Gospel courage doesn't come from within.
      - This makes it different to how the world approaches courage.
      - "Believe in yourself," "be true to yourself," and so on.
- Instead, the Bible says courage comes—not from within—but from another.
  - Do you see that in the second half of **V13**?
  - **Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.**

#### [Illustrate]

- A few months ago, I asked some of our elders what happened in their lives that made them want to live wholeheartedly for God?
  - Was it a Bible study, a particular program, or a class?
  - But after some discussion, one of them said: "It was Christ."
    - The room went silent—then nodded in agreement.
    - We met him, saw him as he really is, and haven't gotten over it since.
- It's Jesus—and being with Jesus—that makes all the difference.

#### [Apply]

- It's the same with gospel courage:
  - If Jesus is just an idea or a concept to us, we're not going to witness for him.
  - But if he's real to us:
    - If we're compelled by who he is—the beauty and strength of his courage...
      - How he stood trial and refused to step back.
      - How he didn't bow to men, but perfectly obeyed God.
    - And if we see that he did it all for us—even when it took him to a cross...
      - Gospel courage grows in proximity to Christ.
      - Time with him gives us courage to speak for him.
    - Till, like the disciples, we say: **V20: we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.**

- Here's the invitation:
  - When we lack courage—when fear rises—we don't rely on ourselves.
  - We turn to Jesus...
    - Before the trouble comes—we walk with him every day.
    - And when the trouble comes—we throw up SOS prayers.
- Will you do that this week?
  - Be with Jesus...
  - Then go:
    - Have that hard conversation you've been avoiding.
    - Bite the bullet and invite that friend to church.
    - Or ask your difficult colleague for coffee and look for opportunities to speak of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

- The Roman governor had Polycarp tied to the stake. The crowd gathered. The flames rose. And this old man lifted his eyes and prayed: *“Lord, I bless you that you have counted me worthy to share in the cup of Christ.”*
- We may never face the flames, but we will face pressure:
  - To stay quiet.
  - To compromise.
  - To blend in.
- But the God who gave gospel courage to Peter, John, and Polycarp—will give us the same today.

## THE CLOSE

- And don't miss the encouragement we get at the start of the text—in response to gospel courage:
  - Some are **greatly annoyed (V2)**—that will happen today.
  - **But V4: many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**
    - The Lord continues to add to their number day by day those who are being saved.
    - Have gospel courage, dear ones—he's doing the same today.
- The church at its best has gospel courage.
  - Courage to witness for Christ.
  - Courage to speak the truth in love.
  - Courage that can be ours from being with Jesus.

## RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

---

### Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.