**Apostolic Boldness**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man died and went to heaven, where St. Peter met him at the gate and asked him, “Why should we let you in? Have you done any good deeds that really stand out?” The man answered, “Well, there was this one time when I saw a bunch of bikers threatening a young woman, and I told them to leave her alone. When they just laughed at me, I walked up to the biggest, meanest looking one and smacked him upside the head, pulled out his nose ring, and kicked over his motorcycle, and told him if he ever bothered her again that he’d have to answer to me.” St. Peter said, “Wow! That’s pretty impressive. But we don’t have anything about that in our records here. When did it happen?” The man replied, “About two minutes ago.”

The Bible has a word for the way that man acted that day. It’s called *boldness,* which the dictionary defines as *courage* or *bravery.* It’s the kind of thing Peter and John have been showing here in Acts 4, where we pick up our study of Acts. You’ll remember from our last study that the religious leaders in Israel threw the apostles in jail for preaching Christ. Then when they released them, they went *right back* to preaching Christ, *knowing* that those leaders could easily throw them in jail *again—*and this time throw away the key! Or even get the Romans to crucify them, as they did with the Lord.

And knowing all that, when they still went right back to preaching Christ, that was something that even Israel’s religious leaders had to admit was *courageous* and *bold,* as we see when Acts 4:13 says of those leaders:

**“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”**

Now the first things I should point out here is that this boldness was something *new* for these apostles. When these same religious leaders came to arrest the Lord, we read that “all the disciples *forsook Him, and fled”* (Mt. 26:56). And that was only *forty days earlier!* You might be thinking, “Wow! Did they get a crash course in *courage* or something?”

Well, yeah, they did! They got it the day the Lord rose from the dead. Once they saw that *He* could rise from the dead, they knew that *they could too,* for they remembered that He had said,

**“…I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, *though he were dead, yet shall he live”* (John 11:25).**

Once the apostles knew they too would rise from the dead, even if their enemies killed them, that made them *absolutely fearless.* I mean, if a man is not afraid of dying, *what are you going to threaten him with?*

Now is there anything you can learn from that? Your apostle Paul says

**“…He which raised up the Lord Jesus *shall raise up us also…*” (II Corinthians 4:14).**

That means *you too* should be fearless when it comes to serving the Lord.

Years ago I read something that one of the president’s Secret Service agents is quoted to have said. He said that it is *extremely* difficult to stop a man *who’s not afraid to die.”* And that was now true of the Lord’s apostles, and it should be true of us as well.

Now I know you’ll probably never be asked to die for the Lord. But He does ask us to live for Him. Paul says,

**“…He died for all, *that they which live should not henceforth live unto them-selves, but unto Him which died for them*, and rose again” (II Corinthians 5:15).**

But maybe what you’re afraid of is spending the only life you have serving the Lord, instead of living it for yourself. But if you’re saved, you should know that *this isn’t the only life you have.* You have a life that will begin after this one ends, and will last for all eternity! So you *won’t* be giving up the only life you have to serve the Lord, you’ll be spending it with eternity in view. And after forty years of serving the Lord in the ministry, I can tell you that you won’t regret choosing to serve Him, for it’s *way* more satisfying than living your life selfishly for yourself.

But now the question here is, why did these religious leaders *marvel* that “unlearned” men could be bold? I mean, how smart do you have to be to be courageous? How smart was it for the man in our opening story to mess with the biggest biker of the bunch?

Well, to answer that question, we have to figure out what these leaders meant when they said the apostles were “unlearned and ignorant.” And what they meant by that was the same thing they meant when they called *the Lord* unlearned in John 7:14,15:

**“Jesus went up into the temple, *and taught*. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, *having never learned?”***

Now when they said the Lord never “learned,” that was their way of calling Him *unlearned.* And when they wondered how He knew “letters,” they weren’t saying they were surprised the Lord knew the alphabet. *Knowing letters* is a figure of speech. It used to be that if you called someone “a man of letters,” that meant he was a man of *education.*

And you know that’s what it meant here, for the Lord had just finished *teaching* in the temple, and they could tell from His teaching that He was a man of learning when it came to knowing the Bible. They just didn’t know how He came to *be* a man of learning. When they said the Lord “never learned,” what they meant was that He had never learned *from them.* He’d never attended any of their Bible schools of higher learning, such as the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

But that didn’t keep the Lord from knowing the Bible, of course. He’d been studying it since He was old enough to read it! And it didn’t keep Him from being *bold* either, as we see a few verses later:

**“Then said some of them…lo, He speaketh *boldly*…” (John 7:25,26).**

*Now* the question is, what had this “unlearned” Messiah *said* that made them think He spoke *boldly?*

Well if we back up a couple of chapters in John’s gospel to Chapter 5, we see that the Lord healed an impotent man who couldn’t walk on the sabbath. And the religious leaders in Isael had been giving Him grief about it ever since, for they thought He broke the law of Moses in so doing, the commandment that said not to work on the sabbath. Look how the Lord answered them:

**“If a man on the sabbath day *receive circumcision,* that the law of Moses should not be broken; *are ye angry at Me*, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?” (John 7:23).**

Now what He was doing here was reminding those religious leaders that *they worked on the sabbath too!* The law said that Hebrew boys had to be circumcised on the 8th day after they were born, whether the 8th day fell on the sabbath or not! When it did, their priests had to work on the sabbath and *circumcise the boy.*

Do you see how the Lord turned the tables on them? He used the Bible against leaders who claimed to be *experts* in the Bible! And to do that, you had to be *bold.* It too *courage* to show those leaders up like that. They prided themselves on being experts when it came to the Bible. And when people saw the Lord show them up that way, they said He spoke “boldly.”

And that’s what the apostles were doing here in Acts 4! Remember, those same religious leaders perceived that the apostles were *also* unlearned and ignorant, for *they* hadn’t been to their Bible schools either! But they could see that they were bold, for *they too* had just finished using the Bible against them!

In our last study, we saw that when the apostles healed a lame man, and Israel’s leaders asked them by what authority they did it (Acts 4:7), the apostles answered in the same way that the Lord answered those leaders, *by quoting Scripture and using it against them.*

**“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.**

**“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:10,11).**

Peter answered them by quoting Psalm 118. Now dumb Gentiles like us wouldn’t know what that verse meant, *but those Jewish leaders did.* They knew which stone the apostles had in mind, for one of their favorite prophets wrote,

**“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation *a stone,* a tried stone, a precious corner stone, *a sure foundation…”* (Isaiah 28:16).**

Israel’s leaders knew that God promised that someday He’d lay a stone in Israel, a foundation stone that those leaders were supposed to recognize was their Messiah *and build the kingdom church on Him.* But they *also* knew the psalm that Peter was quoting, the psalm that predicted that they *wouldn’t* recognize their Messiah, they would set their foundation stone at nought instead. And they knew from that psalm that God would take the stone that they set at nought and make Him the cornerstone of the kingdom church, despite their rejection of Him.

And when the apostles reminded Israel’s leaders of God’s prediction that they’d set their Messiah at nought, a prediction found *in their own Bibles,* That was boldness that those leaders hadn’t seen *since the Lord* used the Bible against them!

And that explains what Acts 4:13 means when it goes on to say that they “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” To take knowledge of someone was a figure of speech that has different meanings in Scripture, but here it meant *to understand* something of the apostles, as it did in Acts 24:8. That means when these leaders saw the boldness of the apostles, when they saw them do what the Lord did and use the Bible against them, they understood from this that they’d been with Jesus. They learned from this that they’d been hanging around the Lord, for *nobody* had been able to show them up using the Bible since He had done it.

And do you know what *really* tipped them off that they’d been with Jesus? Peter quoted *the exact same verse from Psalm 118 that the Lord quoted* when they asked *Him* by what authority He’d done the things that *He* did:

**“…the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, *By what authority doest Thou these things and who gave Thee this author-ity*...Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner…*?” (Matthew 21:23,42).**

When Israel’s leaders then heard the apostles quote the same psalm, they said, as it were, “These guys have been with Jesus. That’s where they learned how to take the Biblre and use it to tie us up in knots!”

Now how about you? Can people tell that *you* have been with Jesus? You know, every time you open that Book, you spend time with the Lord. And if you know how to *rightly divide* it (II Tim. 2:15), *you too* can tie religious leaders up in knots if you have too.

Pastor Cornelius R. Stam, the founder of *Berean Bible Society,* was also an unlearned and ignorant man, at least by the standards of most religious leaders. He hadn’t gone to any of their Bible schools of higher learning. But purchase his book “Holding Fast the Faithful Word,” and you’ll see how he tied the religious leaders of his day up in knots with God’s rightly divided Word.

Not because he took any pleasure in doing so, but because they *needed* to be corrected—just like the leaders in Peter’s day needed correcting. And just like pastors and Bible teachers *still* need correcting by unlearned and ignorant mopes like us. If you are ever sharing Paul’s gospel with a man and you find out he’s a pastor or a Bible teacher, don’t be intimidated! A lot of them have come to see the grace message because someone like you shared it with them, so don’t back down!

Now as we read on in our text here in Acts 4, we see the frustration that the leaders were feeling:

**“And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (Acts 4:14).**

The lame man that they healed was standing there with them as proof that they had worked a miracle. And those religious leaders *wanted* to say something against it; they wanted it so bad they could *taste* it, as they say. They wanted to say it was either a real cure of a fake injury, or a fakecure of a realinjury. But they knew it was a real cure of a real injury, for they’d know this lame man for forty years (4:22).

Now compare that to the “healings” you see on television, where you don’t know the person getting healed, so you don’t know if they are legitimately sick or injured or not. So people say all kinds of things against those healings, and they should! I know I do. But when these leaders couldn’t say anything against the healing of the lame man, they decided to have a closed door meeting:

**“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves” (Acts 4:15).**

Israel’s leaders had been interrogating the apostles out in the open, but now that they knew what they were up against, they wanted a closed-door meeting to talk it over amongst themselves. Once the apostles were ushered out of the room, we read that they continued,

**“Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).**

Now when it says that everyone in town knew about this miracle, that meant that whatever they decided to do to these apostles, they had to consider what everyone in town would *say* about what they did. And that reminds us of something that happened to the Lord in John 11:47, where we read:

**“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, *What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.”***

As you can see, these leaders here in Acts 4 were facing the exact same situation they faced when the Lord was here working miracles of healing.

Now here I’d like to offer a little suggestion as to what they could have done after seeing the Lord’s might works. They could have—oh, I don’t know, *admitted they were wrong about Him,* and believed on Him and gotten saved! What did they do instead: A couple of verses later in that passage, we read:

**“Then from that day forth they took counsel together *for to put Him to death”* (John 11:53).**

Rather than believe on Him, they decided to *kill Him.*

Now it hadn’t gotten that bad here in Acts 4 yet, as we see as we read on:

**“But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name” (Acts 4:17).**

Now here you see that not only didn’t those leaders believe what the apostles were preaching, they didn’t want anyone *else* to believe it either! So basically nothing had changed from when the Lord was here, for He had remonstrated with Israel’s religious leaders, saying,

**“…woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:* for ye neither go in yourselves, *neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in”* (Matthew 23:13).**

And that’s what those same leaders were doing here in Acts 4! Not only did they not believe on the Lord, they planned to tell the apostles that they couldn’t tell anyone *else* about Christ either.

And now that they have a plan, they called the apostles back in to tell them about it:

**“And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).**

Now when it says that “they called them” back into the room, we have to ask a question about that. We just read the plan that the leaders hatched behind closed doors, while the apostles were out of the room. So when Luke went to write down what they said here in those verses, *who told him what they said?* That is, how could he have known what was said when the apostles had been asked to leave the room?

There are only two possible answers to this question. First, what was happening here could have been similar to what happened back when the people of Israel kept escaping the traps set for them by the king of Syria. When the king asked who the mole might be among the members of his staff, who kept tipping the Jews off about his traps, one of his servants said,

**“None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, *telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber”* (II Kings 6:12).**

As you can see, it was *the Holy Spirit* who was the mole! He heard everything that king said, and told the prophet Elijah about all his plots against God’s people when none of them were around to hear them. And the Spirit might have told Luke what the leaders said behind closed doors here too.

But there’s another possible answer to how they knew what the those religious leaders had conspired to do behind closed doors. Two chapters later, we read,

**“…a great company *of the priests* were obedient to the faith”(Acts 6:7).**

Eventually some of those religious leaders *got saved!* So it’s *also* possible that *they* told Luke what those men said when the apostles weren’t around.

But now, think about what they ere saying here. It was essentially, “We can’t prove you’ve done anything wrong, but we want you to stop doing it!” Oh, that’s nice! Look how Peter answered them:

**“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Acts 4:19).**

Now here, did you notice that Peter and John didn’t have to take time to talk it over? They didn’t have to do what those leaders did and excuse themselves while they went off by themselves and weighed the pros and cons of whether or not they should stop preaching Christ. They just asked the leaders a question, saying (as it were): “You say we should stop preaching Christ, but *God* says we shouldn’t. So what do you think we should do?” And when they said, “judge ye,” that was their way of saying, “You guys are judges, *judge this!”*

Now this is one of the verses we always cite when it comes to the subject of what’s called *civil disobedience.* That is, the question of whether or not believers must always obey our rulers in the government.

Here it helps to remember that Israel was a *theocracy,* a nation governed by *God.* We live in a democracy, a nation governed by *the people.* But the Greek word for “God” is *Theos,* and God’s people in Israel were a theocracy. That means Israel’s *religious* leaders were also her *civil* leaders, and God’s people were expected to obey them, just as our apostle Paul says *we* must obey *our* rulers (Romans 15:1-8; Titus 2:1,2).

But we know we *don’t* have to obey if our rulers tell us to do something that is contrary to God’s Word, for *Peter* is refusing to obey *his* rulers when they ordered him to stop preaching Christ. And this is how it has *always* been for God’s people.

For instance, when the people of Israel were in bondage to Egypt, and Pharaoh began to think that there was getting to be too many of them, he decided to do something about it:

**“…the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives…When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, *then ye shall kill him:* but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, *and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them*, but saved the men children alive” (Exodus 1:15-17).**

Killing a baby would have been contrary to God’s precepts, so the midwives refused to obey the king. Now what’s that tell you about what our government here in the United States says about abortion? We have to live in a country where abortion is legal, and even popular. But if the government ever tells *you* that *you* have to have an abortion, you have to follow the example of the Hebrew midwives and disobey that command. You may be thinking that this could never happen here, but for many years women in China were forced to have abortions there as a means of population control in that very populous country.

Then there’s the time that the king of Babylon commanded people to worship the image he set up *or die* (Dan. 3:4-6). Daniel seems to have been out of town on state business at that time, but his three Hebrew friends *manned up* and said,

**“.…be it known unto thee, O king, *that we will not serve thy gods,* nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:18).**

Now that’s an interesting commandment, for it is a type of something that will happen in the Tribulation, after you and I are raptured. Speaking of a “beast” that Bible teachers refer to as “The False Prophet,” the Apostle John wrote:

**“And I beheld another beast…saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast…and cause that *as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed”* (Revelation 13:11,14,15).**

And don’t forget, the apostles would have lived to see this happen if God hadn’t interrupted His prophetic program for Israel with the dispensation of grace. So what Peter was doing here in not obeying the command of his rulers to stop preaching Christ was good practice for the civil disobedience he would have needed if he lived to see the False Prophet set up that image to the Beast.

I mean, if they’d have obeyed the order not to teach in the name of the Lord, they’d have been *much* more likely to cave in on the command to worship the image of the beast. You see, it’s what the world calls a slippery slope kind of thing. I mean, you might think it no big deal to stop preaching Christ. After all, not everyone is a preacher, right? But if you stop being an outspoken Christian, you’re much more likely to start caving in when it comes to other areas of your Christian life and walk.

You know what else will help you to avoid caving in when it comes to other areas of your walk? Something that we see in our next example of civil disobedience. When King Darius signed an order forbidding people to pray to God, look what Daniel did:

**“…when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber…*he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God,* as he did aforetime” (Daniel 6:10).**

Did you notice Daniel was like Peter and John, in that he didn’t have to think it over, and he didn’t have to confer with his three Hebrew friends behind closed doors either. He just heard the order to disobey God, and he had what we call a knee-jerk reaction, and *automatically* obeyed God, *seemingly without thinking.*

In other words, obeying God had become what we call *second nature* with Daniel. And if you can get to where it is second nature *for you,* then you too will be more likely not to cave in when it comes to obeying God in all things.

You say, “Oh, great, how do I get that?” Well, I’m not going to lie to you. There are no shortcuts when it comes to making obedience to God like second nature. The secret is found in verses like Psalm 119:104, where the psalmist prayed,

**“Through Thy precepts I get understanding: *therefore I hate every false way”***

If you want to learn how to *automatically* hate what’s wrong and do what’s right in a knee-jerk reaction kind of way, you must spend time reading and studying the precepts of God found in His Word.

And if you’ll just saturate your mind with the Word, you’ll start saying things like Peter and John declared in the next verse in our text:

**“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).**

Peter says, as it were, “Even if God *didn’t* tell us to preach Christ, what are we supposed to do, forget about all the lame men we saw the Lord heal? And all the lepers we saw Him cleanse? Are we supposed to see all His miracles and *not* tell people that their Messiah has come?”

Now you weren’t there to see and hear the things that the apostles saw and heard, of course. But you can tell people what you see *in the Book!* And you can tell them what you hear pastors and teachers say in church!

Well, when Peter and John said that they simply *had* to say what they’d seen and heard, that wasn’t exactly the response that these rulers were hoping for. So they decided to threaten the apostles *again:*

**“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21).**

Now you know good and well what those wicked leaders would have done to the apostles had it not been for the people. They would have relieved them of the burden of their heads! You’ll remember that the people were the only thing that kept them from killing the Lord (Mt.21:45,46). And the people kept their rulers in check here in Acts 4 as well, for they knew that a great miracle had been done. And the way that they knew this is found in the last verse of our text:

**“For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed” (Acts 4:22).**

Here we see that Peter didn’t just heal a man who stopped walking a few months earlier to help Peter *stage* a miracle. This man hadn’t walked *in forty years,* for we learned earlier that he was lame “from his mother’s womb” (Acts 3:2).

Now we don’t see miracles like that today in the dispensation of grace, of course, now that God is no longer giving men the gift of healing. But what we *do* see today is men who haven’t walked *with God* for forty, fifty, sixty years or more *get saved* and *start* walking with Him.

If you’re not saved, it’s never too late to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ paid for all your sins when He died for them on Calvary’s cross. And it’s never too *early* to believe either. Wouldn’t you rather get to the end of your life and see that you spent it serving God?

Maybe you’ve been saved for many years, but haven’t been walking with God. Isn’t it time you started? Don’t you want to be able to look back at your life from eternity and know that you acknowledge Him in everything you did in life, which is the very *definition* of walking with God. Why not start today?

You’ll be eternally glad you did.