

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Unstoppable Gospel*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: God gives us courage to speak boldly for Christ.

Introduction: One of my favorite war movies is *The Flying Leathernecks*. As the title suggests, it's about a squadron of Marine pilots during World War II. Early in the movie, one of the young pilots leaves during a mission. He claims his engine is running rough, but that was just a convenient excuse. John Wayne played the squadron commander, and he later had a talk with the young man. The young man said, "Tell me, Major, do good pilots get so scared that they break into a cold sweat, and their mouths get so dry that..." John Wayne interrupted him and said, "Every one of them!" The pilot said, "You?" Wayne replied, "Every time I push the throttle forward. And if anyone tells you he doesn't, avoid him. He's an idiot!"

Fear is a natural human emotion. Show me a person who claims he's afraid of nothing and I'll show you someone who is probably not being honest. Nevertheless, the Bible says God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). If that spirit does not come from God, where does it come from? It either comes from the devil or from your own sinful flesh. If you're a follower of Jesus, God's Holy Spirit lives within you, and He gives you the courage to tell others about Jesus even in difficult circumstances.

I. The discouraging conditions.

- A. Peter and John had just healed a lame beggar in the temple.
 1. The beggar was widely known to the people in the temple (3:10), so they were amazed that he could walk again. Peter took advantage of this occasion to tell them about Jesus.
 2. The commotion also attracted the attention of Jewish religious leaders.
 - a. "The captain of the temple" – The temple had its own guards to take care of trouble in the temple complex.
 - b. "The Sadducees" – This sect of Judaism was not as numerous as the Pharisees, but carried much more weight.
- B. The temple officials took Peter and John into custody.
 1. The Sadducees were particularly upset.
 - a. They were "grieved" that Peter and John preached the resurrection of Jesus. They did not believe in any kind of bodily resurrection.
 - b. Because they cooperated with the Romans, they wielded tremendous power. They were leery of anyone that might upset the status quo.
 2. Anytime God begins to work, the devil will try to discourage you.

- a. He will try to make you give up, or worse yet, he will tempt you to compromise the gospel.
- b. God is still at work even when the devil attacks. As a result of Peter's message, five thousand more people came to Christ.

II. The dramatic confrontation.

- A. The next day Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin.
 1. It included Annas and Caiaphas.
 - a. Annas had been the high priest, but was deposed by the Roman government. Even so, most Jews regarded him as the high priest.
 - b. Caiaphas was Annas's son-in-law and the official high priest.
 - c. Both men were instrumental in putting Jesus to death.
 2. They asked Peter and John, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?"
 - a. The Law of Moses warned about false prophets that performed signs and wonders (Deut. 13:1-5).
 - b. If Peter or John said they had performed this miracle in the name of a false god, the Sanhedrin would have reason to stone them.
- B. Peter set forth three important truths:
 1. The lame man had been healed by Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
 - a. The Sanhedrin no doubt remembered Jesus, since they had tried Him and put Him to death.
 - b. "Whom God raised from the dead" – Peter was saying, "You thought you'd gotten rid of Him, didn't you? Well, you didn't! He's alive again, and He performed this miracle through us!"
 2. Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.
 - a. Peter cited Psalm 118:22, which was a favorite among the writers of the New Testament.
 - b. The Jewish religious leaders were supposed to be the spiritual "builders" of Israel, but they had rejected the Cornerstone that was chosen by God Himself.
 3. Jesus is the only way of salvation.
 - a. Jesus is the only one that died for our sins and conquered death, so He is the only one that can save us.
 - b. If we truly believe Jesus is the only way to God, how can we not want others to know about Him?
 - Many people today have embraced a "dual covenant" theology. They believe that the Jews have their own covenant with God, so it's not necessary for them to trust in Jesus for salvation. This would have been strange talk to Peter. He told Jewish religious leaders that salvation is found only in Jesus.

III. The decisive conclusion.

- A. The Sanhedrin was unsure how to react to Peter and John.
 1. They "marveled" at their boldness.
 - a. They were "unlearned and ignorant". That doesn't mean they were completely illiterate, but they certainly did not have the same level of education as the Jewish religious leaders.
 - b. They knew that the two men had been with Jesus.
 - c. They could not deny a miracle had happened.

2. They decided to put some fear into them.
 - a. They commanded them not to preach about Jesus anymore.
 - b. They “threatened” them. We can only guess what kind of things they promised to do to them if their warning was not heeded.
- B. Peter insisted he would obey God first.
 1. Even the Jews understood that their first loyalty was to God.
 - a. They had resisted when Pontius Pilate tried to bring images of Caesar into Jerusalem.
 - b. Peter and John had witnessed the greatest event in the history of the world, and they weren’t about to be silent.
 2. How should Christians relate to civil authority?
 - a. Peter understood the importance of civil government, and later urged Christians to respect it (1 Peter 2:13-17).
 - b. If we cannot obey both God and the government, our first duty is to obey God (1 Peter 4:15-16).

Conclusion: We’re living in a day where Christians are increasingly under attack. Some have been forced to choose between their faith and their businesses. If you are facing opposition because of your Christian faith, it is only natural to feel afraid. The quality that sets a brave man apart from a coward is not the absence of fear. Even the bravest of people get scared. The difference is, a brave man rises above his fears and does what needs to be done. Don’t let your fears prevent you from standing for Christ. Put your trust in God, do what He has commanded you to do, and He will give you the courage to stand strong.

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