

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

**Introduction:** The cowardly lion in “The Wizard of Oz” had one great request: courage. He says these words as he ponders courage’s merits: “Courage! What makes a king out of a slave? Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist, or the dusky dusk? What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder? Courage! What makes the dawn come up like thunder? Courage! What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the “ape” in apricot? What have they got that I ain’t got? Courage.”

The world we live in is increasingly hostile to Christianity and the person of Christ. Yet many of us face this world in the same way that the cowardly lion faced his. John the Baptist lived in a world like ours. He faced it with great courage. As we look at his life, let his example build courage within you to stand as he did *against* the culture and *with* Jesus Christ.

**1. It takes courage to accurately assess your place in God’s plan.**

- a. John was a small part of God’s plan – “*spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1:17) “*I must decrease*” (Jn. 3:30)

Zechariah and Elizabeth treasured their son. He was the fulfillment of their dreams and of prophecy. It would have been easy for their lives to revolve around him, and because of that, John could have grown up self-centered and conceited. But he didn’t. He was honored to be a part of the plan, but he fully recognized that it wasn’t about him. He was just a part – a significant part, yes – but just a part.

- b. Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s plan – “*Prepare ye the way of the LORD*” (Matt. 3:3); “*Behold the Lamb of God*”

It was about Jesus. John’s role was to get people ready for the coming of the Messiah. He had multiple opportunities to claim something for himself that was not rightfully his, but each time, he pointed people to the One who was yet to come. John knew his place and gladly occupied it even though some wanted him to go away, and some wanted him to take a position for which he was not commissioned.

**2. It takes courage to forcefully communicate your audience’s offense to God’s plan.**

- a. To the common people – “*Repent*” (Matt. 3:2)

John was different. Different draws a crowd. The attention a crowd provides can become addictive and can cause a person to soften his message so that

the crowd will not get offended and fade away. But John told them exactly what they needed to hear – “Repent!” No one likes to be confronted with their sin. Doing so requires a lot of courage because it will cause people to become antagonistic toward you. John had a mission; he could do nothing less.

- b. To the religious people – “O generation of vipers” (Matt. 3:7)  
John was familiar with the religious crowd. He had been around them all his life. His dad was a priest. It was probably his dad’s expectation that John become a priest. It takes courage to stand up against your own kind when you see their evil actions and get a first-hand look at what their hearts are really like. Doing so would not have made Zechariah very popular among his peers. But it needed to be done for their sake and for the nation’s sake.
- c. To the political people – “violence...no...accuse falsely...be content” (Luke 3:14); “It is not lawful for thee to have her” (Matt. 14:4)  
Rome was the invading force. Rome’s soldiers came to John either because they were bored or because they were sent to see whether this guy was inciting rebellion. They found a harmless “crazy” man whom they could make fun of. But they also found a man who wouldn’t back down in the face of anyone regardless of whether it was a soldier or a king.

### 3. It takes courage to humbly admit your doubts about God’s plan

- a. John questioned Jesus when Jesus came to be baptized – “I have need to be baptized of thee” (Matt. 3:14)  
John didn’t understand. The people who came to him to be baptized were doing so as evidence of their repentance from sin. Jesus had never sinned. Why should He be baptized? And if anyone was going to be baptized, it should be John by Jesus not Jesus by John. By John’s own admission, he wasn’t worthy to untie the straps to Jesus’ sandals. Though John questioned and did not understand, he obeyed. That took courage.
- b. John questioned Jesus when John was about to be killed – “do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3)  
John didn’t understand. He fully expected that when the Messiah came that everything would be set right in the world. That hadn’t happened. John was in prison. He wanted to make sure that he wasn’t going to die for nothing. “Are you the one?” he asked. Jesus sent word back and told John to examine the evidence of the acts that Jesus had done. John believed in spite of the fact that life wasn’t turning out as expected. That took courage.

### 4. It takes courage to faithfully follow your path in God’s plan.

- a. Even if it means living a life void of comfort – “in the wilderness” (Matt. 3:1); “locusts...camel’s hair” (Matt. 3:4)  
He never owned a home, had a wife, fathered a child or did any of the other normal activities that add comfort to life. God had a different plan for him. Live off the land...life away from people. It takes courage to be different and to trust that not your plan but God’s plan for your life will produce the highest possible good both for you and for those around you.
- b. Even if it means dying a death void of meaning (in the world’s eyes) – “beheaded John in the prison” (Matt. 14:9)  
John spoke words of courage. Those words changed much in the lives of individuals, but little in the society around him. All they seemingly accomplished was to get him thrown in prison where he lost his life. It looked

like it had all been in vain. The world looked at John and labeled him “fool”. But Jesus looked at John’s life and called him “prophet” (Matt. 11:9) and “great” (Matt. 11:11). Worldly accomplishment is not what determines the worth of a life. If that were the case, then Jesus’ own life would have been a failure (Dan. 9:26). Instead, it is obedience to the plan of God wherever that leads that gives real meaning to life.

**Conclusion:** On January 8, 1956, five men lay dead in an Ecuadoran jungle speared through by the very people they had come to rescue. When the world found out what had happened, there was great outrage. How could the mission of these five courageous men and their families have ended in such failure? Jim Elliot, the best remembered of the five, once wrote in his journal, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” They courageously followed God’s plan and gave of their lives in order that others might know this God they faithfully served. The world looks at people like them and us and says, “What fools! What a waste!” God looks at people like them and those who are courageously willing to follow in their example and says, “What a treasure!”

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