

October 22/23, 2005

*The Unstoppable Church*  
**Courageous Christians**  
**Acts 4:5-31**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

Several years ago when we were going through the Book of Philippians, I used an imagery that I would like to bring back and attach to the Book of Acts. Let's imagine that you are taking a cruise. You fly to San Diego and you prepare to board the cruise ship. Imagine the frame of mind you would be in. You're thinking about the buffet. You're thinking about the swimming pool. You're thinking about getting a suntan. You're thinking about just a relaxing time on the cruise ship.

Next to that cruise ship is a battleship. The people boarding that battleship en route to Iraq would be in a completely different frame of mind. They're not thinking about a buffet. They're not thinking about a swimming pool. They're not thinking about sunbathing. They're thinking about: *Will I come back alive?* They're thinking about their mission. They're thinking about their assignment. Their frame of mind is completely different.

Now let's imagine that by mistake you got on the battleship, thinking you were on the cruise ship. You would wonder, *Where is the buffet here? I don't see the pool. The service here really isn't very good.* And then somebody starts shooting at you, and you wonder, *What kind of a cruise ship is this?* It would be evident that unless you quickly change your mind, you're not going to survive.

Many, many, many Christians, when they came to faith in Jesus, thought they were boarding the "Love Boat"—a cruise ship—because that's in essence what was presented to them. They thought they would just sail into the sunset and everything would work out. But when you open up the pages of Scripture, what you find is that God doesn't promise this to be a cruise ship. To be a follower of Jesus, you must understand you boarded a battleship, and you must get in that frame of mind or you will not survive.

The first three chapters of the Book of Acts may appear to be a cruise on the Love Boat. God is doing amazing things and thousands of people are coming to faith in Jesus. But beginning in chapter 4, the sobering reality sets in: This isn't a cruise ship; this is a battleship and the war is on. From Acts 4 until the end of the book, 28 chapters, there will only be three chapters that do not include persecution.

We do not live out our Christian faith on a playground. We live out our Christian faith on a battleground. In Acts 4 we are going to catch just a glimpse of life on the battleship. We don't know for sure how much time has elapsed, but it's approximately 60 days from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The religious leaders were convinced if they could eliminate Jesus they would stop the movement. So 60 days earlier, Jesus was eliminated. Now here they are just two months from that execution and the movement of Jesus is exploding in ways they could never have imagined. And in their panic they arrest Peter and John and throw them in jail overnight.

We pick up the story in Acts 4:5:

**On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and**

**Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”** (Acts 4:5-7, \*NASB)

We are told by Luke the names of some of the members of the council, the Sanhedrin—most importantly, Caiaphas and Annas. Peter and John are not appearing before a handful of low-level flunkies; this is the top of the food chain. These are the most powerful men in the religious world. As a matter of fact, we quickly identify that these were the men who 60 days earlier had Jesus scourged and executed. So we are quickly aware of the seriousness of this situation.

I think it’s easy to soft-pedal the amount of courage it took for Peter and John to take their stand. Sixty days earlier they were hiding in the shadows, watching the most horrible scourging and execution imaginable. What they saw must have absolutely terrified and sickened them. Wouldn’t you believe that that night in jail they were wondering if that same fate awaited them? Why wouldn’t they? They were appearing before the exact same people who sentenced Jesus.

They asked the question that they asked Jesus: “By what power, in what name do you do these miracles?” And Peter responds:

**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”**  
(vs. 8-12)

It’s very interesting when you go back to Luke 21. Jesus had a discussion with His disciples, and in essence He told them, “You will be arrested, you will be imprisoned, you will be persecuted. And when that moment comes when you will stand to give an account, know that I will be there. I will empower you. I will give you the words to say to such an effect that the questioners will be left with no ability to respond or reply.”

So here Peter is standing before the council, and God fills him with His Spirit, not so that he can speak in tongues but that he might fulfill the mission. We’re going to see this as a consistent pattern all the way through the Book of Acts. The filling of the Spirit was not about tongues, it was not about fire, it was not about smoke. It was about Acts 1:8—that “you might accomplish the mission I have given you.”

When Peter responds, he says basically the same thing Jesus said to them all the way back in Mark 3: “If I’m on trial today for doing this kindness, this good deed to this lame man [*this man who had been lame for 40 years, as we learn in the text,*], then I’m guilty. And I’ll tell you how I did it: I did it in the power, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

There is this repetition of “Jesus of Nazareth” in the Book of Acts because these religious leaders named him that and they didn’t name him that as a compliment. It was a putdown, that Jesus was nothing but a man from the wrong side of the tracks. But they are reminding them now, “This one that you said was just a man, this one that you put down—Jesus of Nazareth, by the way, whom you crucified—is the same one that God raised back to life.

I know I sound like a broken record on this, but it's because the Book of Acts sounds like a broken record on this. Over and over again in these early chapters while they're still in Jerusalem, while it is still just a matter of days off of the burial and resurrection, the message continues to go to the religious leaders: *The tomb is empty*. The fact that the Christian Church is thriving today is evidence that the religious leaders could not in any way demonstrate that Jesus was still in the grave. Peter continued to pose that to them: "You crucified Him. The tomb is empty; He is alive." And there was nothing they could say because they knew that was true. He says, "This Jesus whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead..."

And then he quotes from Psalm 118 (the same psalm that Jesus quoted to these same people): "It is this stone, which they as the builders rejected." They looked at this stone and said, "This stone won't work" and they threw it out. That very stone is the stone that God used—not just as a stone in the building, but it is the chief cornerstone. It is the stone upon which the rest of the building is built.

There is some debate about whether this is *cornerstone* or *capstone*. At the end of the day it matters little which it is. The cornerstone was on ground level and a massive, massive stone that anchored the whole building together. The capstone has the same function at the end of the building. It was a mammoth stone that would be set on top in order to anchor everything together. Either way, the same point is being made: This is the stone that holds everything together.

And then Peter makes one of the most exclusive statements in all of the New Testament: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." We talked about this last week. This is not a popular message in a pluralistic age, where people want to believe all faiths, all religions ultimately lead to God. People have the freedom to believe that, and you'll live with the consequences of that belief. But if you believe and affirm the message of the Bible, you cannot hold that view—because the Bible from cover to cover is very clear: "There is salvation in no one else but the name of Jesus."

Now this was important here for two reasons. One is, in a witness of these religious leaders, they had to understand that unless they recognize that their self-righteousness can't save them, unless they recognize that this Jesus whom they rejected is actually the Messiah, they have no hope. So the message is declared to them.

But it also explains why Peter and John and the Church were so passionate in declaring the message. If people believe that all roads lead to heaven and all religions eventually get you to God, then it is acceptable to say, "Let's just live and let live. Let's just everybody have their own spiritual experience." And that is primarily where we are at as a culture.

But we don't believe that as a church. Therefore, we have to live consistent with our belief. Our belief is there is *one* way to God and that is through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the most loving, kind thing I could ever do for someone else is to proclaim to them the message of Jesus. If I believe Jesus is the only way to God and I keep that message to myself, that is the ultimate act of selfishness. So Peter declares to them that powerful statement.

**Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. (vs. 13-14)**

This is exactly what Jesus said: “I will empower you. You will speak. They will have no reply. They will have nothing to say.”

They’re amazed because Peter and John are uneducated, untrained men who are confidently, boldly standing before them declaring this message. Now what they mean is that they weren’t professionally trained. Actually, Peter and John were highly educated and trained by the ministry of Jesus Himself. There are lots of ways to be educated and trained. We need to remember that just because someone isn’t professionally trained doesn’t mean that he or she is not capable of doing significant things for God.

I am pro-education. I have a fair amount of education myself. But I believe with all my heart that there are many ways to be trained and educated and that God can use any of us to do a significant work for Him. Throughout church history that has been true. Many untrained, uneducated (in the professional sense) men and women have been used of God: Charles Haddon Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, G. Campbell Morgan, A. W. Tozer, just to name a few.

These religious leaders are backed into a corner to where they don’t even know what to say; they have no reply. And in the process they’re thinking to themselves, *This feels vaguely familiar; we’ve experienced this before.* Who was it that had such powerful replies that people often had nothing to say and could only walk away with their tail between their legs? The answer is Jesus. So now they’re starting to put it together: *Wait a minute, there’s only one other person who has done this to us before. These men have been with Jesus...* as they’re experiencing the very power and life of Jesus coming through Peter and John. They have no solution other than to put them out and circle the wagons.

**But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.” And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. (vs. 15-22)**

This again reminds us of the deception of religion. They circle the wagons and they admit that a miracle has occurred: “This man who had been lame for 40 years is now able to walk. He stands among us.” There is no way to deny it, and everybody knows that. Wouldn’t you think at that point they would say, “Maybe we’d better rethink some things”? But instead of that, their only conclusion is, “Yes, a miracle has occurred. What is the solution? We’ve got to silence these men.”

At that point, all they were concerned with was their holding on to position and power. They no longer were in pursuit of the truth, so their best solution was, “Let’s bring them in, let’s intimidate them, let’s quiet them down.” So they bring them in (and you would have to imagine that the threats were very intense) and in essence told them, “You cannot proclaim this message anymore.”

Peter and John with great boldness and courage stood before these men and said, “You know, you can do what you want, you can say what you want. We cannot stop proclaiming what we have seen and heard.” Remember again, 60 days earlier these same religious officials had Jesus scourged and crucified. Peter and John were eyewitnesses to that. This took a significant amount of courage to look these men in the eyes and say, “Do what you want; we will not obey you.”

The text says they basically threatened them further, and you would have to imagine that threatening was fairly intense. They are pretty desperate at this point, and they turn them loose because there’s nothing else they can do. Everybody knows a miracle has occurred. Everybody is glorifying God. And so they turn Peter and John loose.

**When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.’ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”** (vs. 23-28)

Peter and John are released. They go immediately back to their fellow believers. They tell them what the religious leaders told them, and immediately they go to prayer. They go to prayer because they’re afraid. They go to prayer because they’re excited. They go to prayer because they’re overwhelmed. They go to prayer because they don’t know what else to do.

The opening of their prayer is quite interesting. When they said, “O Lord,” the word *Lord* is a familiar one to us in the New Testament. However, this particular Greek word is very unusual. This isn’t the typical word that is used. This is a word that always is used in reference to slave/master relationships. They understood at this point, *This is not going to be a ride on the Love Boat; we are now on a battleship*. They understood that their very lives were at stake, and they were acknowledging, “God, You are the master; I am the slave.” That was their way of saying, “God, whatever You want, You tell me. I’m in this for keeps. I’ll pay the price.”

They first acknowledge God as the Creator God. He is the all-powerful, sovereign God. Then they make a wonderful statement regarding the inspiration of the Scripture, and we’ve seen several of these already in the Book of Acts. Verse 25: “...**who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said...**” In other words, this is God’s word through a human instrument.

And then they quote Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is a psalm about the Gentile kings rallying together to try to conquer God’s anointed king, David. It’s a reminder that the earthly powers, the earthly kings, have no power to defeat God. As a matter of fact, if you look in Psalm 2 it says that God looks at them and He laughs at the foolishness that they think somehow they can take on God and win. This isn’t just some manmade movement. This is the very movement of God. This is the unstoppable Church. A handful of religious leaders do not have the power to stop the movement of God.

They think about Jesus as an example of that. When Jesus walked this earth, Herod the king tried to stop Him. Pontius Pilate tried to stop Him. The Gentiles (meaning the Romans) and the Roman army tried to stop Him. The Jewish leaders tried to stop Him, and all they accomplished was that they perfectly fulfilled the plan of God, just as it had been recorded hundreds of years earlier in the Scripture. In other words, at the end of the day they simply were used by God to perfectly fulfill the plan, which was a statement again of God's sovereignty and His power. You cannot defeat or stop God.

They then make three specific requests:

**“And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (vs. 29-31)**

Three specific requests. Number one: “God, take into account the threats that the religious leaders have made.” They didn't spend all night focused on it; it was not a distraction. They simply acknowledged, “God, You know they're threatening us. We're just going to give this to You, and You take care of it.” They in essence took the burden and passed it on to God.

Second of all, they wanted the confidence, the boldness to proclaim the message of the gospel in what they now understood would be a very intense environment. They didn't pray, “God, make sure that nobody else threatens us; make sure that nobody persecutes us. God, we want a cruise on the Love Boat.” They understood this was going to cost them. They just said, “God, give us the confidence, give us the boldness to step it up and to accomplish the mission.”

And thirdly, “God, continue to do Your work. Do your healing. Do your signs and wonders.” They had just come off this miracle, where because of the miracle they were given a platform to boldly proclaim the gospel, and thousands of people came to faith. And that is what they were asking: “God, You continue to show Yourself. Give us a platform; give us the boldness to declare the message.”

God's answer is that He rocked the place. Wouldn't you love that? Every time your prayer is in alignment with the will of God, He shakes the house and you know, *Okay we're on here!* And they were all filled with the Spirit so that they could speak what? So that they could not speak in tongues; so that they could speak boldly the gospel of Jesus Christ. They would accomplish the mission.

We love these stories when they end so positively, but let us not forget that most of these Christians would eventually be persecuted for their faith and many, if not most, would ultimately die for their faith. They had counted the cost. They were willing to pay the price, and the price would ultimately cost them their lives.

Down through church history that has always been true, that the Church of Jesus Christ has gone forth with a significant amount of bloodshed, as courageous Christians down through history have taken their stand to proclaim the message. And for many of them it cost them their lives.

Persecution has a certain cleansing effect on the Church. There are those today who preach a message of health, wealth and prosperity. They're inviting you to ride with them on the cruise

ship. But church history will tell us as soon as the slightest persecution comes along, the Love Boat sinks and the battleship remains.

A bishop in China (1984) declared that what wiped out liberal theology from China was persecution. As soon as the persecution came on, liberal theology disappeared. And over the last 25 years the Church has absolutely exploded in China.

During the horrible Nazi regime, the Church has been criticized for not taking a stand; and for the most part, those criticisms are valid. The Church was very liberal in Germany at that time, and for the most part the Church sided with Hitler and were a part of his movement. But there was a remnant of the Church that had the battleship mind frame—who understood the evil of that movement and stood against it—many of whom would ultimately die for that stand.

Albert Einstein was removed from Germany during those days because he was a Jew, and he writes this:

Being a lover of freedom, when the [Nazi] revolution came I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but no, the universities were immediately silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers, whose flaming editorials in days gone by proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, like the universities were silenced in just a few short weeks.

Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration for it because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly.

- as quoted in Erwin W. Lutzer, *Hitler's Cross* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 157-58 as cited in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 40.

The fact is that during Hitler's campaign there was only one institution that stood opposed to him, and that was the Church of Jesus Christ. One of the courageous leaders of that church in Germany was a man by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a Lutheran pastor and a man of remarkable courage. Bonhoeffer, even before Hitler, was highly critical of the church because of their liberal theology, because of what he termed their "cheap grace." Perhaps the statement that Bonhoeffer is best known for is when he said, "When God calls a man, he bids him, 'Come and die.'" That statement would become the story of Bonhoeffer's life.

Erwin Lutzer in his book *Hitler's Cross* records the death of Bonhoeffer:

By the order of Himmler, Bonhoeffer was loaded into a prison van and taken to the extermination camp at Flossenburg. A few days later they reached the tiny village of Schonberg, where the prisoners were herded into a small schoolhouse now used as a temporary lockup. One of the prisoners recounted that Bonhoeffer led them in a prayer service on the text "With His stripes we are healed," bringing comfort to his fellow prisoners.

The door was pushed open, and two members of the Gestapo entered, demanding that Bonhoeffer follow them. He took the time to bid farewell. His last recorded words were, "O, God, this is the end—for me, the beginning of life."

His mock trial continued through the night and into the morning hours. Our last picture of him comes from a description given by the doctor who was asked to witness the execution. He recorded that between five and six o'clock, Bonhoeffer and three others were led to their execution. The doctor said that when the door opened, he saw Pastor Bonhoeffer still in prison clothes praying to the Lord his God.

The prisoners were ordered to strip. Then they were led down a flight of steps under the trees to the secluded area of their execution. Naked under the scaffold in the sweet spring woods, Bonhoeffer knelt for the last time to pray. Then he climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. Five minutes later, his life was ended, April 9, 1945.

Speaking of Bonhoeffer's faith, the doctor wrote, "The devotion and evident conviction of this man moved me to the depths...In almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Three weeks later Hitler committed suicide, and a week after that the war in Europe ended. The Nazism against which Bonhoeffer stood was disgraced, and the church which he had so passionately judged was left to ponder its own failure of nerve...

If we ask why God did not spare Bonhoeffer's life for just a few more weeks so that he might be freed by the Allies, we cannot answer. We can only be certain that he died at God's appointed time and in God's appointed way. He who loved Christ with such fervency followed his Master in dying a violent death at the hands of others...

Bonhoeffer's legacy lives. He is the constant reminder that the church must always remain the church, even at great personal cost. Christ invites all of us, "Come and die." But if we do not die to ourselves while our earthly life lasts, we will probably not be willing to pay the final price should our faith require it.

- from Erwin W. Lutzer, *Hitler's Cross* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 187-88.

I don't know what it may cost me to be a follower of Jesus. I only know I must be willing to pay that price.

This morning as we wind this down, I want to narrow our focus to a very specific age group. I had a seminary professor Haddon Robinson who used to often say, "If I had to make a list of the ten most courageous Christians, five of them would always be teenagers." And I agree with that. Nobody lives out the intensity of the war day in and day out like a teenager.

Our teenagers are a significant part of the church today, but they are also the leaders in the church of tomorrow. I want to close by talking specifically to those of you that are middle school, high school, college age—those who live out the war with intensity every single day.

It was April 20, 1999 that Rachel Scott went to school like any other day. She had no idea that by the end of the day she would die in the massacre at Columbine High. But make no mistake, Rachel Scott was not randomly killed. She was clearly executed for her faith in Jesus Christ. Listen as her father, Darrell Scott, tells a portion of her story in this video:

Rachel was a bubbly, outgoing young girl. She was beautiful. She loved life. She was boy crazy. But she told her sisters, "I'll never live to be old enough to get married." She told her best friend Jeff, "God has a purpose for my life." Jeff is her first cousin and they went to school together. She said, "Jeff, God is going to use me to touch the young people of this nation, and I'm not going to live to be very old, and I don't know how He's going to do it." But she believed that God was going to use her.

Four days before my daughter died, we sat at a table and I had the most incredible talk with her that I'd ever had in my life. For two solid hours we poured our hearts out to each other. We wept. We hugged each other. And we expressed our love for each other and appreciation in a way that I've never experienced with any of my children.

I love all five of my children with all of my heart, and I didn't understand that. I didn't understand the year before Rachel died when she came in the living room one day and she said, "Dad, would you pray with me because I want to do a mime called 'Watch the Lamb' (a song

by Ray Boltz) in my high school talent show.” She said, “I’m scared because I don’t want the kids to make fun of me.” But she said, “I want to do it as a witness.”

So she went out and bought the makeup and she got the clothing she needed. She played the recording, and she took it to her high school talent show where rock bands and all kinds of activity was going on. I’ve never sat and cried at one of my children’s performances, but I sensed an anointing from God in that high school auditorium that day, and I sat there and wept. And I had no idea that that mime was going to be performed behind her casket by the young girl who taught her that mime, one year later, to the whole world—that they were going to see the mime that Rachel performed in high school. I want to tell you something: When God speaks something to your heart, be obedient. You never know when He’s going to use that.

She wrote a poem about this time that goes like this:

*Just passing by, just coming through, not staying long.  
I always knew this home I have will never last.*

And then her tone changes and she says:

*I don’t understand. I want to feel You in my heart, mind, soul, and life.  
I want heads to turn in the hall when I walk by.  
I want them to stare at me, watching and wanting the life that You put into me.  
I want You to overflow my cup with Your Spirit.  
I want so much from You.  
I want You to use me to reach the unreached.*

*You want to know what I feel when I think about constantly what is on my heart?  
God.  
Spiritually, He is all I think about.  
I want to serve Him so much.*

Now, Rachel wasn’t a super spiritual person that went around always spouting out religious things. My daughter was popular in school; she had many friends. She had witnessed to Eric and Dylan three weeks before they killed her. She had a class with them. Two of her friends overheard her talking to those boys about the Lord and the violent videos they were making.

And she writes on April 20, 1998: “It’s like I had a heavy heart and this burden upon my back, and I don’t know what it is. There’s something in me that makes me want to cry, and I don’t even know what it is. Things have definitely changed. Last week was so hard. I lost all my friends at school. Now that I’ve begun to walk my talk, they make fun of me. I don’t even know what I’ve done. I don’t really have to say anything and they turn me away. But you know what? It’s all worth it to me. I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I am not going to justify my faith to them, and I’m not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will. If my friends have to become my enemies for me to be with my best friend Jesus, then that’s fine with me.” I’m convinced with all of my heart that Rachel Joyce Scott knew God was preparing her heart for a sacrifice to be made, and she expressed the willingness to make that sacrifice in her diary.

Eric and Dylan came over a hill at the back of the school. They shot a young man by the name of Mark Taylor who was witnessing to two of his friends at the moment that he was shot. They then turned and shot my daughter in the leg. She got up to run and they shot her through the chest, and a bullet went through her backpack and she fell. They went down some outdoor steps to the cafeteria where they killed Danny Rohrbough, a young man who was bravely holding the door of the cafeteria open to let his friends escape. They then came back up the stairs and walked over to Rachel and lifted her head up. Eric Harris lifted her head up by her hair and said, “Do you still believe in God?” because she had talked to him about God. And she said, “Yes, I do,” and he shot her through the temple and killed her. The last words she heard

were, “Do you believe in God?” and the next words she heard were the very voice of God Himself saying, “Well done, thy good and faithful servant.”

- Darrell Scott, Distributed by Vision Video, Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490 [www.visionvideo.com](http://www.visionvideo.com). Used by permission.

I met Darrell Scott and found him to be a kind, gentle, godly man. And as he unfolded the story of his daughter, it was obvious Rachel didn't just at the spur of the moment determine to take a stand. She had committed before that, that whatever that meant, she was willing to count the cost and pay the price. She believed in her own heart that she would ultimately give her life for the cause of Jesus. Since 1999, thousands and thousands and thousands of people have come to faith in Jesus as her father continues to tell her amazing story.

If you are in middle school or high school or college age, in the auditorium or in the upper room, I want to ask you this morning: Are you willing to count the cost? Are you willing to pay the price, to take a stand and be a follower of Jesus?

For some of you, you have already made that decision. You live as a courageous Christian every day in a war zone. You take your stand. Sometimes that means you stand alone, but you stand for Jesus. For you this morning, this would just be re-upping, saying, “I'm in. I've been in. I'm still in. I'm a follower of Jesus.”

But for others of you, probably many of you, you would have to admit this is a big step up. You are one way at church; you're another way at school. At school your faith is something you tend to keep pretty quiet. You're trying to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church, and it's a miserable way to live.

You say, “If I do this, what will it cost me?” I'm not sure. I can tell you for sure it will probably cost you some friends. It will certainly cost you some popularity. There will certainly be days when others will make fun of you. There will be days that will be very uncomfortable. And there will certainly be days when you will be forced to stand alone. That I can tell you with certainty. What it might cost you beyond that, I don't know. I'm just asking you: Are you willing to pay the price?

We don't do this very often here, but we feel compelled this weekend to ask you to respond. If you're in middle school or high school or college age, in the upper room or here in the auditorium, and you're willing to say, “You know, I've counted the cost. I'm willing to pay the price. I want to take my stand. I want to be a courageous Christian that will stand for Jesus”—I'm going to ask you to get up out of your seats and come down and join us in front. Just kneel down at these steps. One thing I know with certainty: If you're not willing to take your stand in here, you have no chance of taking your stand out there.

I also understand that when you're standing for Jesus, sometimes it feels like you're standing all alone. But we want you to know that isn't true. So those of you who are connected with these kids in some way—youth leaders, small group leaders, parents, YFC leaders, whatever—I invite you to come down and just lay a hand on them and let them know, “Hey, we're in this together; you're not in this alone. We'll pray for you and we'll support you. We're there with you through this journey.”

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October 22/23, 2005

**Study Questions**  
*The Unstoppable Church*  
**Courageous Christians**  
**Acts 4:5-31**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

### Opening Discussion

1. In a general sense, what does it mean to count the cost of following Jesus?
2. In a much more personal sense, what has it cost *you* to follow Jesus?
3. What does a courageous Christian look like in our American culture?

### Bible Study

1. Read Acts 4:1-31. Compare these verses in Acts with Luke 21:12-15 and I Peter 4:12-19. If we as Christians are going to take our mission seriously, what should we expect?

2. Rehearse what Peter and John had witnessed first hand regarding Jesus and His suffering only a matter of a few weeks earlier. What might they have been thinking that night in jail?

How much courage did it take to face off against the same religious leaders that had Jesus crucified?

3. What gave Peter and John their courage?

What is the key to our being courageous to stand for Jesus when the pressure is on?

4. What amazed the religious leaders according to Acts 4:13?

What does that tell us about God's ability to use us to accomplish His purpose?

5. Peter and John practiced what we call civil disobedience. When is this acceptable?

6. Read Psalm 2 which is quoted in Acts 4. In what way does Psalm 2 describe the unstoppable Church?

What is the effect of persecution on the Church around the world?

Is the church more effective in times of persecution or prosperity? Why?

Are you more faithful to the mission of Christ in times of persecution or struggle or in times of prosperity? Why?

## **Application**

1. Identify one specific area where you need to be more courageous to take a stand for Christ.
2. What do you learn from this text in Acts that can help you take that stand?
3. Take the time to pray for one another and the specific areas where you need to take your stand.