

## **“Profiles in Courage”**

### **Acts 4:1-22**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

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Tomorrow at this time our hallways and classrooms will be filled with children attending Vacation Bible School. I appreciate all the hard work that has gone into planning and preparing this year’s Bible School. Putting on a successful school requires commitment and dedication from many members. On behalf of the entire church, I thank you.

This year’s theme is “Arctic Edge: Where Adventure Meets Courage.” The focus is upon that word courage. “Courage,” wrote John Kennedy fifty years ago in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, Profiles in Courage, “is the greatest human virtue.” In this book, he profiled the lives of eight senators that exhibited great courage and changed the course of history.

A study that led to this year’s VBS theme revealed one of the greatest needs of children is courage. I am not surprised. We live in a world where even children are intimidated and threatened, leaving them vulnerable and frightened. Where can they find courage to confront their challenges and overcome their fears? The Bible has an answer to that question and the students will study the lives of several Biblical characters to find it. They will study Elijah, Esther, Nicodemus, Saul, Peter and John.

This morning, I use as my text the story the students will study on Friday. It is about two of Jesus’ disciples, Peter and John. On their way to the temple one day to pray, these disciples noticed a crippled man sitting near the entrance. He asked for money as they approached, but they had none to give. They did not ignore this man that had been crippled forty years, though. They stopped and helped him to his feet, healing him in Jesus’ name.

You would think that everyone would be excited about what they had done and celebrate this man’s good fortune. Many were, but not all. The religious authorities became quite concerned when the disciples gave the resurrected Jesus credit for healing the lame man and encouraged everyone to put his or her faith in Christ. To silence the disciples, the authorities threw them in jail overnight. The next day, they told the disciples to quit preaching and speaking in the name of Jesus. They threatened the disciples and told them harm would come to them if they continued to talk about Jesus, to which Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” Acts 4:19-20.

It took a lot of courage for Peter and John to be loyal to God and faithful to their mission in the midst of great danger. As a matter of fact, it was one of the greatest demonstrations of courage in the New Testament. The men that arrested and threatened them were the same ones that crucified Jesus. They proved how ruthless and brutal they could be through their treatment of Jesus. Peter and John knew their lives were in great danger. Yet they persevered.

Our children and young people need this same kind of courage. **What do children need the courage to do?** There are many things. They need courage to play the

piano at a recital, sing a solo, try out for cheerleading, play on a ball team, tackle hard subjects at school, go away to camp or meet new friends. All of these challenges require courage.

They also need courage to do what is right when they face the temptation to do wrong or encounter ridicule for doing right. Honoring God with their decisions will not always reap rewards. It might even cost them a high price. They need courage to be truthful, kind, considerate, gracious, industrious, unselfish and obedient to parents and teachers.

**Where will they find this courage?** Where did Peter and John find it? God was the source of their courage and Jesus modeled it for them, especially when he was crucified. In 4:8, Luke reminds his readers that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, the source of his resurrected courage.

Last Sunday we looked at the story of the Holy Spirit filling the hearts of the disciples at Pentecost. You may recall an idea I shared with you from George Buttrick. He wrote that Pentecost could hardly have been the first time the disciples felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was the guiding and enlightening Spirit that led them on many occasions. It was at Pentecost, however, that the disciples became aware of the Spirit as power and realized the vital role it would play in enabling them to go forth to their work of witness bearing.

It was the empowering Spirit of God that turned Peter from a coward who denied Jesus three times after the Lord's arrest to a bold witness for Jesus before the intimidating Sanhedrin. This man who weeks before had been silenced by an anonymous young maiden could not be silenced by Israel's most prestigious and powerful leaders. What made the difference? It was God's empowering Spirit in his heart giving him a voice and the confidence he needed to speak.

The Holy Spirit will do the same for our children and us. This is why everyone, young and old alike, needs a close relationship with God through faith in Christ.

May I also remind you that children not only need to hear about courage, they need to see it. Luke 4:13 is my favorite verse in this story. "When the Sanhedrin **saw** the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled and ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."

Courage needs to be seen and thank goodness it can be. The Sanhedrin saw it clearly and boldly in Peter and John.

Parents, your children need to see courage modeled in you. You need to be the presence of Christ in their lives demonstrating how God has used you to make the world better.

They need to hear about the times in your life when you were confronted with difficult choices and chose to do the right thing, even at great sacrifice or peril. They need to know why you decided to do the right thing and if you are glad you did. Tell your children how you handled intimidation and fear. Let them know the source of your strength.

"When the Sanhedrin **saw** the courage of Peter and John, they were astonished." Have your children ever seen your courage? Have they heard your story? Why not become one of their Bible School teachers this year and continue their study of courage at home.

