

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Before the Council: No Other Name

Acts 4:1-31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 4:1-31 brings the church into direct collision with hostile authority, and it sets out some of the most important truths in the book. What is doctrinally at stake includes the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone (there is no other name, v. 12), the centrality and offense of the resurrection, the principle that we must obey God rather than men when human commands contradict His, and the transforming effect of having been with Jesus. Christ is presented as the rejected stone become the cornerstone, the one foundation of salvation.

The heaviest doctrinal weight falls on Acts 4:12, salvation in no other name. Teach the exclusivity of Christ clearly and lovingly. Also teach carefully the principle of obeying God over human authority, which is not a license for general rebellion but a settled refusal to disobey God when commanded to.

Yet aim at the heart. Here are ordinary men made bold, a church that responds to threats with prayer, and a Savior whose name divides and saves. Help students grow in courage, in dependence on prayer, in time spent with Jesus, and in unembarrassed confidence that He alone is the world's only hope.

Question 1

Student Question:

The priests and Sadducees were greatly annoyed because the apostles were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (vv. 1-2). Why was the message of the resurrection so offensive to these leaders, and why is the resurrection still central and confrontational today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Sadducees were the religious establishment, and they denied the resurrection of the dead altogether (Acts 23:8). So the apostles' message struck at the heart of their theology. To proclaim that God had raised Jesus was to declare them wrong about one of their core beliefs, and to vindicate the very man they had condemned.

But the offense went deeper than theology. If Jesus is risen, then the leaders who crucified Him are exposed as having murdered the Author of life, and the One they rejected is alive and reigning. The resurrection is not a comfortable doctrine for those who have set themselves against Christ; it is an accusation and a summons.

The resurrection remains central and confrontational. It is the heart of the gospel; if Christ is not raised, our faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). And it confronts every person with the reality that Jesus is Lord, that death is conquered, and that we will answer to a living Christ. It cannot be treated as a private opinion.

Help students see that the resurrection is not a side issue but the center of everything, and that its very claim, that Jesus is alive and Lord, will always provoke those who would rather He stay dead and silent.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The resurrection as the center of the apostolic message (1 Corinthians 15:14-17)
- The Sadducees' denial of the resurrection (Acts 23:8)
- The resurrection as both vindication of Jesus and accusation against His enemies
- The confrontational nature of the claim that Jesus is alive and Lord
- The resurrection as more than a private opinion

Discussion Prompts

- Why did the resurrection so threaten the religious establishment?
- How is the resurrection still central to the gospel today?
- Why does the claim that Jesus is alive and Lord still provoke opposition?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter and John were arrested and jailed simply for preaching Jesus (vv. 3-7). When standing for Christ costs you something, ridicule, exclusion, a strained relationship, an opportunity lost, how do you tend to respond? What would faithful courage look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Following Jesus has always carried a cost. Peter and John spent the night in jail for doing good and preaching Christ. Jesus had told His followers to expect opposition: if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you (John 15:20).

Most of us will not face jail, but we do face smaller costs: being thought narrow or intolerant, losing a friendship, being passed over, enduring mockery, feeling out of step with the culture. Invite students to name the costs they actually encounter.

Explore the common responses: shrinking back, hiding our faith, going along to get along, or growing bitter. Faithful courage is different. It counts the cost honestly and still chooses to honor Christ, trusting that He is worth it.

Encourage students with the example before them and with the promise of Jesus that those who lose their lives for His sake will find them (Matthew 16:25). The cost is real, but so is the reward, and the same Spirit who emboldened Peter strengthens us. Courage is not the absence of fear but faithfulness in spite of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cost of following Christ (John 15:20)
- Faithful courage that counts the cost yet honors Christ
- The temptation to shrink back under pressure
- The promise of reward for those who suffer loss for Christ (Matthew 16:25)

Discussion Prompts

- What does standing for Christ typically cost you?
- How do you tend to respond when your faith costs you something?
- What would faithful courage look like in your situation right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

When commanded by the highest religious court to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused, saying they must obey God rather than men (vv. 18-20). What principle does this establish about the limits of human authority, and how should believers apply it carefully and rightly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter and John establish a foundational principle: whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. When human authority commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, the believer must obey God. As Peter later puts it plainly, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

This principle must be taught carefully and not abused. The New Testament generally calls Christians to honor and submit to governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), to pray for rulers, and to be model citizens. The right to disobey is narrow: it applies only when obedience to human authority would require disobedience to God.

Notice the apostles' demeanor. They are respectful, not rebellious. They do not riot or revile the council; they simply explain that they cannot stop obeying God. Their disobedience is principled, peaceful, and willing to accept the consequences.

Help students apply this rightly. We honor authority in the home, the workplace, and the state as a matter of obedience to God Himself. But no human authority, however powerful, can

command us to deny Christ, abandon His truth, or disobey His clear commands. In such cases, like the apostles, we must quietly and respectfully obey God, whatever it costs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The duty to obey God rather than men when commands conflict (Acts 5:29)
- The general call to honor and submit to authority (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17)
- The narrow and principled scope of civil disobedience
- Respectful, peaceful refusal willing to accept consequences
- No human authority able to command denial of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is the principle Peter and John establish about human authority?
- Why must this principle be applied carefully and not abused?
- How do believers honor authority while drawing the line at disobeying God?

Question 4

Student Question:

The apostles could not keep silent about what they had seen and heard (v. 20). Where in your life do you find yourself staying quiet about Christ out of fear or convenience? What is one relationship in which God may be calling you to speak more openly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter and John could not stay silent; the truth of Christ was burning in them. For many of us, the problem is the opposite: silence comes far too easily. We let fear, awkwardness, or convenience seal our lips.

Invite honest reflection on where we go quiet. At work, with extended family, among friends who are skeptical, in casual conversations where we could mention Christ but choose not to. Often we are not opposed; we simply find it easier to say nothing.

Explore the real reasons behind our silence: fear of rejection, not wanting to seem pushy, lack of confidence, or simply a faith that has grown cool. The apostles spoke because their hearts were full of a Christ they loved and had experienced.

Encourage one concrete step. Who is the person God is bringing to mind? What is one honest, loving thing you could say about Christ to them this week? We may not have the apostles' platform, but we have the same Lord and the same good news, and we can refuse to let fear silence us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer's calling to speak openly of Christ
- Examining the fears behind our silence
- Witness flowing from a heart full of Christ
- Boldness as faithfulness despite fear

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most easily stay silent about Christ?
- What is the real reason behind that silence?
- In which relationship is God calling you to speak more openly?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter declared that Jesus is the stone that you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone (v. 11). What does this image from Psalm 118 teach us about Jesus, and what does it mean that the rejected one became the foundation of everything?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws on Psalm 118:22, a verse Jesus had applied to Himself (Matthew 21:42): the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The builders, the religious leaders responsible for recognizing and receiving God's Messiah, examined Jesus and threw Him aside as worthless. But God made the rejected stone the cornerstone of His entire saving work.

A cornerstone was the foundational stone that set the line and bore the weight of the whole structure. To call Jesus the cornerstone is to say that everything God is building, His church, His salvation, His kingdom, rests on Him. He is not optional or peripheral; He is the foundation.

There is rich irony and grace here. Human rejection could not thwart God's purpose; it served it. The very stone men discarded became the one stone on which everything stands. What people despised, God exalted.

Help students see the personal weight of this. Every person, and every life, is being built on some foundation. Jesus is either the cornerstone that gives the whole structure strength and alignment, or He is the stone we have set aside. There is no neutral ground; He is either everything or nothing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the rejected stone become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42)
- Christ as the foundation of the church, salvation, and the kingdom
- Human rejection serving rather than thwarting God's purpose
- God exalting the One whom men despised
- Every life built on some foundation, with Christ as the only sure one

Discussion Prompts

- What did a cornerstone do in ancient building, and what does it say about Christ?
- How did human rejection of Jesus end up serving God's purpose?
- What does it mean for Christ to be the cornerstone of your life?

Question 6

Student Question:

The builders examined Jesus and cast Him aside, yet He was the cornerstone all along (v. 11). Are there areas of your life where you have quietly set Christ aside, treating Him as less than the foundation? What would it look like to rebuild on Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is possible to honor Christ in word while sidelining Him in practice, building parts of our lives on other foundations entirely. The image of the cornerstone invites us to examine where we have rejected the stone we claim to treasure.

Invite students to consider the structures of their lives, their finances, careers, relationships, plans, sense of identity, and to ask honestly: is Christ truly the cornerstone here, setting the line and bearing the weight, or have I built this part on something else, security, success, approval, comfort?

Often we discover that Christ is the cornerstone of our religious life on Sunday while other things are the cornerstone of our daily decisions. The call is to rebuild, to bring every area into alignment with Him.

Encourage one specific area. What part of your life needs to be re-founded on Christ? Rebuilding may mean repenting of a misplaced trust, reordering priorities, or consciously bringing a decision under His lordship. A house is only as sound as its foundation, and Christ alone is sure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining where Christ has been functionally set aside
- Building every area of life on Christ as foundation
- The difference between honoring Christ in word and in practice
- Repentance as re-founding our lives on Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you quietly built on a foundation other than Christ?
- What is the false cornerstone you are tempted to trust?
- What would it look like to rebuild that area on Christ?

Question 7

Student Question:

The council was astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, perceiving that they were uneducated, common men, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus (v. 13). What does this teach us about how God uses ordinary people, and about the effect of time spent with Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The council expected timid, unimpressive fishermen, and instead they met courage and clarity. The explanation they landed on was simple and profound: these men had been with Jesus. Time in the company of Christ had changed them.

First, this teaches how God uses ordinary people. Peter and John had no formal training, no rabbinic credentials, no social standing. Yet they shook the most powerful court in the land. God delights to use the common and overlooked, so that the power is seen to be His and not ours (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Second, it shows the transforming effect of being with Jesus. The boldness, wisdom, and Christlikeness the council saw were the residue of three years walking with the Lord and now of the indwelling Spirit. We become like those we spend time with, and time with Christ marks a person.

Help students take both truths to heart. You do not need to be impressive for God to use you; you need to be available and to be with Jesus. The most powerful credential a Christian can carry is the unmistakable mark of one who has spent time with the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God using ordinary, uncredentialed people (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)
- The transforming effect of time spent with Jesus
- Boldness and Christlikeness as fruit of being with Christ
- Availability rather than impressiveness as what God uses

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God so often choose ordinary people for His work?
- What does it mean that the council could tell they had been with Jesus?
- How does spending time with Christ change a person?

Question 8

Student Question:

People could tell that Peter and John had been with Jesus simply by watching them (v. 13). If your coworkers, neighbors, and family observed you closely this week, what would they conclude about who you spend time with? Where do you most need to be reshaped by time with Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the council's observation into a mirror. The mark of Jesus was visible on Peter and John. Would it be visible on us?

Invite honest reflection. What do the people around me conclude from watching my reactions, my words, my priorities, my patience or impatience, my speech under pressure? Do my life and demeanor point to Christ, or to something else entirely?

Being with Jesus is not automatic; it is cultivated through Scripture, prayer, worship, and obedience. We become like Christ as we spend time in His presence and His Word. Where our lives do not look like Him, it often traces back to thin time spent with Him.

Encourage students to name one area where they most need reshaping, their temper, their tongue, their anxiety, their love for others, and to commit to drawing nearer to Christ there. The goal is not to perform Christlikeness but to be with Jesus until His character begins to show through us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The visible mark of Christ on those who walk with Him
- Christlikeness cultivated through time in His presence and Word
- Self-examination about what our lives reveal
- Transformation as the fruit of being with Jesus

Discussion Prompts

- What would people conclude about who you spend time with by watching you?
- In what area does your life least resemble Christ right now?
- How could you draw nearer to Jesus in that area this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter declared, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (v. 12). What does this verse teach about the exclusivity of salvation in Christ, and how do we hold this truth with both conviction and love in a world that prizes tolerance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and one of the boldest claims in all of Scripture. Standing before the very court that condemned Jesus, Peter declares that salvation is found in no one else; there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. Christ is not a Savior among many; He is the only Savior God has provided.

This exclusivity runs throughout the New Testament. Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). Paul wrote, there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The whole sweep of Scripture points to Christ as the single hope of the world, the fulfillment of every promise, the only sacrifice that takes away sin.

We must teach this with full conviction. It is not arrogance to repeat what God has plainly said; it is faithfulness. To soften it, to suggest that there are many roads to God, is to empty the cross of its necessity. If people could be saved another way, Christ would not have had to die (Galatians 2:21).

But we must also hold it with love, not pride. The exclusivity of Christ is not a club to swing but good news to offer. The same verse that closes every other door flings one door wide open: there is a name by which we may be saved, and it is freely available to all who will call upon it. We are not the gatekeepers; we are beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.

In a culture that prizes tolerance above truth, this claim will be unpopular, and we should expect that, just as Peter did. But love does not mean agreeing that every path is equal; love means telling people the truth that can save them. Help students hold the exclusivity of Christ with both backbone and tenderness, never compromising the message and never delivering it without compassion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation found in Christ alone, no other name (v. 12)
- Jesus as the only way to the Father (John 14:6)
- Christ as the one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5)
- The necessity of the cross, which a second road would nullify (Galatians 2:21)
- Exclusivity held with conviction yet offered with love
- Faithful witness in a culture that prizes tolerance over truth

Discussion Prompts

- What does Acts 4:12 plainly claim about salvation?
- Why does softening the exclusivity of Christ empty the cross of meaning?
- How can we hold this truth with both conviction and love?

Question 10

Student Question:

After being threatened and released, the church gathered not to plan escape but to pray for boldness, and the place was shaken (vv. 23-31). Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to greater courage or faithfulness, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson to a point of response, and the church's prayer meeting is the model. Facing real danger, they did not pray for safety or revenge; they prayed, grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness (v. 29). And God answered, shaking the place and filling them afresh.

Invite each person to name a concrete step. Perhaps it is to speak openly about Christ where they have been silent, to stand firm where their faith is costing them, to rebuild an area of life on Christ as cornerstone, or to spend more time with Jesus.

Point students to prayer as the source of courage. The boldness in this chapter did not come from natural temperament but from the Spirit, sought in prayer. We grow bold the same way, by gathering, praying, and asking God to embolden us.

Close by reminding students that the same Lord who shook that room and filled ordinary believers with courage hears their prayers too, and longs to make them bold, faithful witnesses to the only name under heaven by which we are saved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayer as the source of Spirit-given boldness (vv. 29-31)
- Responding to opposition with prayer rather than fear or retaliation
- Personal response to the call to courage and faithfulness
- The continuing power of God to embolden His people

Discussion Prompts

- What most challenged or stirred you in this passage?
- What specific step toward courage or faithfulness will you take this week?
- How can this group pray for boldness together?