

HOLY CHUTZPAH Transcript

By Dr. Ron Jones

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I've got a question for you this morning. What is the greatest threat to your faith? I'm going to broaden it a little bit. What's the greatest threat to the Christian faith? Now, some of us might say, well, liberal theology is the greatest threat. And we could have a good conversation about that. Certainly in every generation we need to fight for the purity of the gospel and contend for the orthodoxy of faith. Even Jude tells us in his New Testament postcard, he says we need to "contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints." Why? Because in every generation there is, we might say, a theological creep. And we drift in one direction or the other direction. So that's a certainly a reasonable threat to consider. Others might say an oppressive government that wants to take away our religious liberty. That's the greatest threat to our faith. And we could have a good conversation about that one, too. Still others might say, no, I think it's complacency in the church that is the greatest threat to our faith, and possibly so.

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Well, we could go on and on maybe answering the question. Here's my answer to it. I'll just cut to the chase here. The greatest threat to our faith in my estimation is fear. Just good, old fashioned fear. Because fear is the antithesis of faith. That's why over and over again in the scriptures, and certainly in Jesus's conversations with His disciples, He said to them over and over again, "Fear not." I mean, it's the most widespread and commonly articulated command in scripture is to fear not. Why? Because we're so easily given to fear, and fear will eclipse our faith at any moment. So I think it's one of the greatest threats to the faith in any generation when God's people are taken up by fear.

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Whoever said that Christianity is for wimps never read the book of Acts, because what I read in the book of Acts are stories about fearless people, fearless people who went into the 1st century convinced that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And they never let a single bit of fear eclipse their passion for that. And that wasn't always the case. Let's be honest. The apostles, the disciples, when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they were all a bunch of fearful cowards. They ran into the dark of the night and ran away. And even Peter, who followed Jesus all the way to Caiaphas's house as he was warming himself next to the open fire pit there and somebody challenged him. "Hey, weren't you with the Galilean? Weren't you with this Jesus?" He was all caught up in fear, denied Jesus three times, even, you know, dropped a cuss word in there. He was full of fear. But the Peter we read about in the book of Acts is full of holy chutzpah. I mean, boldness. There's not a bit of fear in him. And you've got to ask yourself the question, what changed between the Peter on the night Jesus was arrested and later crucified, and the Peter that we read about in Acts 4?

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Let's pick up in chapter 4. And chapter 4 continues the story of chapter 3. Last time, if you remember, Peter and John were heading to the temple at the ninth hour to pray. And they get there, and there's this lame beggar sitting outside the temple begging of alms as he's been doing for years and years and years. And they make eye contact with him and have a

conversation with him. And they heal the man. And he goes from being a lame beggar to walking and talking and jumping up and down and praising God. And he makes his way into the temple and creates not a small uproar. And all the people, their heads are turning, and they're like, "What's going on here?" And they finally gather around Peter and John and all that.

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Well, chapter 4 continues. And it says, "As they were speaking to the people," Peter and John," the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand." Now, what was happening in the early chapters of the book of Acts and with the early church was nothing less than a spiritual movement that had great momentum. On the day of Pentecost, do you remember, 3,000 people came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Now, by chapter 4, just two chapters later, the number is up to 5,000 men, not to mention their wives and their families. Multiply that, you've probably got a church close to 15,000 people by Acts 4. I mean, this movement is uncontained, and it's beginning to threaten the religious leaders. And when they hear about this lame beggar who is healed, they conspire with themselves, and they come together and try to come against Peter and John and the apostles, threatening them, opposing them.

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The early church faced intense opposition from at least three sources. And they're mentioned here in verse 1. It says that "the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them." The priests, of course, were responsible for daily worship and had great influence over the people. The temple guard, the captain of the temple guard, he was sort of like the chief of police. You know, the temple had some treasures that needed to be guarded, and it had a guard for it. This could have been people that came to even arrest Jesus there in the Garden of Gethsemane, some of them. But, you know, when the captain of the temple guard shows up, it's like the chief of police knocking on your front door. It's not a good day when that happens. And then with that, the Sadducees, they made up a portion of the Sanhedrin, which is sort of like the religious congress. The Sanhedrin were religious aristocrats; very wealthy, politically powerful. They didn't believe in the supernatural. They were sort of like deists in the early stages of the American Revolution that they believed in a supreme being, but they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead and the afterlife and all those supernatural things. And these are three groups of religious people that came against Peter and John. Intense opposition.

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By the way, in my 20+ years in ministry, the greatest opposition I've ever faced is from religious people. And I shouldn't be surprised, because this goes all the way back to the 1st century. Now, we're beginning to face a little bit more opposition from the culture, but, sad to say, a lot of opposition comes from within the circles of religious life. The priests, the temple guard, the Sadducees and all them rise up against Peter and John. They're threatened by some of the things that are happening and they amp up their own threats and their own opposition.

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It says in verse 3 that, “They arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.” I just imagine the text message that Peter sends to his wife and his family. “Honey, I’m gonna be home a little bit late tonight. Thrown in prison. Hug the kids. I’ll be home as soon as I can.” You know, it’s just one of those days. And it says they threw them in prison, interesting, until the next day, for it was already evening. Why? Because Jewish law forbid any trials at night. Well, they tried Jesus at night because they were so intent on rejecting Jesus and getting Him up on the cross that they cast aside their own Jewish laws during that time. But now they’re back and following their Jewish laws. They find it convenient to put Peter and John in prison.

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And we pick it up in verse 5. It says, “On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.” You may remember that it was Caiaphas who was the high priest during the time of Jesus. And the Bible tells us that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they first took Him to Annas. Annas was Caiaphas’s father-in-law. And he was sort of the mafia don. The office of high priest had become highly political with the Jews and the Romans and all that. And Annas held that position for many, many years until he fell out of political favor, but somehow still maintained control. And he passed on the office of high priest to his kids and, eventually, to his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

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Annas was the one who held the franchise, we might say, on the sale of animals at the temple. When you came to worship at one of the feasts and, you know, you walked into the temple, you had to have your animal with you, that spotless lamb. Well, Caiaphas conveniently sold them. He had the franchise to that. You may remember that when Jesus overturned the moneychangers and, you know, all of that, well, He took a direct shot at Annas’s bottom line and his franchise business. And so when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they first took Him to Annas...I just call him the mafia don...and then to Caiaphas. Well, they’re back at it again. There’s Annas. There’s Caiaphas, and John and Alexander are probably extended members of Annas’s family. They’re controlling all of this. They’re the intimidation force. And they’re going to deliver all kinds of intimidation and threats against Peter and John.

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Verse 7, “And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired,”—now comes the inquisition—“By what power or by what name did you do this?” Can you imagine such arrogance? I mean, here it is, a spiritual movement where tens of thousands of people are now following the risen Christ. And they’re so intimidated and so threatened by it. Verse 8, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’”

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Way to go, Peter. Holy chutzpah, Batman. I mean, where did he come up with this? Is this the same Peter who denies Jesus three times, warming his hands next to the little fire pit outside of Caiaphas's house, as cowardly as cowardly can be? Now Peter, after having been thrown in prison, come out and speaks truth to power. Do you have enough holy chutzpah, enough holy boldness to speak truth to power when the situation comes your way?

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You know, I know Jesus told us to count the cost when following Him, but He never told us to consider the consequences. And it takes boldness to live that way. To cast consequences aside and just live for Jesus and speak for Jesus. Peter was thrown in prison, you know. "Honey, I'll be home when I can." I mean, the consequences are irrelevant to him because he's so convinced of the risen Christ. Anytime the early apostles speak, they aren't far from Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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And I love what Peter says in verse 12. If you've not memorized this verse of scripture, you need to commit it to memory. This is one of those scripture memory verses. Hide it in your heart, because this is so important to have right at the edge of your lips. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given among men under heaven by which we must be saved." You know, Peter gets a few pokes in the eye, a few kicks in the chest, you know. He says, "You crucified Him. God raised Him from the dead. This is the stone that was rejected by you. And let's make no mistake about it. There is no name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved than the name Jesus, who is the Christ." Again, that's the some holy chutzpah. That's some holy boldness. And you can't read tone in the black and white pages of scripture. Having chutzpah and boldness for Jesus doesn't mean you have to be ugly with people. He just speaks truth, I want to suggest, rather calmly, speaking truth to power and just lets it sit where it is.

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Well, they're reaction is predictable. Verse 13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.'" Let me rewind that and read that again. "But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." People have been trying to silence free speech for 2000 years and free speech that gives way to religious liberty.

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And don't think it's strange, friends, that we're living in the same time. We have enjoyed these United States of America, and embedded in our Constitution and Declaration Of

Independence and our Bill of Rights and all that this idea of the freedom of speech. But now we have people labeling some speech as bad, you know, as hate speech. Anytime you start to single out some type of speech as bad and you say you can't do that, you've lost free speech. Free speech is either free or it's not. And obviously the apostles were not abdicating for our Constitution and all of that, but free speech and religious liberty go hand in hand. And we're living in a time where people are trying to silence free speech and trying to silence and take back and remove some of our religious liberties. And what I'm just suggesting to us all today is that it's going to take some holy chutzpah, some holy boldness from the church of Jesus Christ to stand up, to not be ugly...you don't have to be ugly...but to speak truth to power. And this is what Peter models for us so beautifully.

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Verse 18, "So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, '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.'" You know, they just went to their eyewitness reports here. Christianity, friends, is not based upon circumstantial evidence. It's based on eyewitness reports. When you don't have an eyewitness in a court of law, then you have to work with circumstantial evidence and, you know, you can build your case and get to guilty or not guilty based on reasonable doubt and all that. But when you...what a prosecutor or a defense attorney wants is an eyewitness. Because an eyewitness who saw this with their own eyes is stronger than any case built upon circumstantial evidence.

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Christianity, friends...and this gives us confidence; it gives us a little chutzpah...is not based on circumstantial evidence. It is based on the record of the eyewitnesses who saw the risen Christ and then wrote down their story and their account. He says, "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and what we have heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old."

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The question is, how do you and I get such holy boldness? I think these are times...we're living in times where we need the church of Jesus Christ not to cower in fear, not to (0:19:00.1) give in to the political correctness of our day, trying to force us to, you know, tamp it down just a little bit. "Don't say Jesus is the only way; make Him *a* way. You know, just make Him more palatable, and that's fine." By the way, when we say Jesus is the only way, that He's "the only name given among men under heaven by which we must be saved," all we're doing is echoing what Jesus Himself said and what the early apostles said. We didn't come up with this. We're just in a long line of the orthodox Christian faith where Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me." Or as the apostles said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." We either believe that and have the holy chutzpah to say it, or we cower in fear and lose so much of the gospel in our culture.

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Well, how do you get (0:20:00.1) holy boldness? I'm going to give you three ways that I think are self-evident from the story here, even as it continues in chapter 4. Number one is to pray for it. Pray for holy boldness. As it says in verse 24...let's actually start in verse 23. "When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord...'" And they begin this prayer that goes all the way down to verse 29. It verse 29 it concludes. "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." They were in prayer. And it's no secret that the early church was a praying church, and we see this in Acts 1 before the day of Pentecost, on the day of Pentecost, even after the day of Pentecost they were praying. And when Peter and John were finally returned to the people, the people held a prayer meeting. And they prayed again. And they prayed that God would give them the boldness to speak His Word. Where you start in all of this is you pray for boldness.

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You may have a personality that's a little bit like, maybe, Timothy in the New Testament, a little more timid. You say, "Boldness just isn't me." I get that. I understand that. Paul had to encourage Timothy a little bit. Remember, Timothy was a young man that he was about to install as the lead pastor at the church at Ephesus, a church that Paul planted along the western coast of modern Turkey. A wonderful church in a very cosmopolitan city. You and I would have loved Ephesus. We would have loved the church in Ephesus. Paul was there for three years, and then he put Timothy in as the lead pastor. And in his first chapter of his first letter, he says to Timothy, "God has not given you a spirit of fear and of timidity but of power and of love and of a sound mind." You kind of get the sense that maybe Timothy was shaking in his sandals a little bit. He was a little bit timid. Maybe it's because he was young and he was stepping into the leadership role. But Paul says, "Listen, that timidity, that fear in you, that's not of God. He has given you a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind."

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So maybe you feel a little bit like Timothy sometimes. Pray for boldness. Pray for God to superintend the natural personality that He's given to you so that when you're in a conversation with maybe a member of your extended family or a neighbor or a coworker and it's a time where you need to speak a little truth to power or you need to stand up to say a word on behalf of Jesus and the gospel, you have the holy chutzpah at that moment to speak the truth. Pray for that boldness.

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I think it's interesting...hold your place here in Acts and go with me to Ephesians 6. I find it very interesting that the apostle Paul even asked the church at Ephesus to pray for him that he would have boldness. Acts 6 beginning in verse 18, "Praying at all times in the Spirit," Paul says, "with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." And then he adds this personal note. He says, "And also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." Paul is concluding a discussion about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 and how we fight spiritual battles. He talks about arming yourself with the armor of God. And then he concludes

by talking about warfare prayer. And he adds in there that personal note. He says, “By the way, will you pray for me? That God will give me boldness as I speak the mysteries of the gospel.” Paul? Paul asking for boldness? I mean, come on, the most bold guy we read about in the New Testament is the apostle Paul. Even naturally, personality wise, he was a pretty bold guy before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. I mean, he was a bold terrorist, tearing apart Christian families and churches. But Paul found it necessary to pray for holy chutzpah, for some holy boldness. And if Paul needs to pray for that, how much more those of us all these years later. So it’s simple, but just pray that God would give you boldness in that moment when it’s needed.

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Secondly, tether yourself to the Word of God. Let’s go back to Acts 4. And beginning in verse 24, it says, “And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord...’”—here begins the prayer—“‘who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit...’” Now they’re going to go into the Old Testament and to the book of Psalms, specifically, Psalm 2. “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.’” Verse 27, “‘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 plan had predestined to take place.’”

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Now, that’s a powerful prayer. And it’s filled with a lot of good theology and references to a specific passage of scripture. There are some lessons just in how to pray here. They start by addressing the Lord as the sovereign Lord of the universe. They talk about how whatever His hand and His plan had predestined to take place. They were convinced that God had not lost control. That He was the sovereign Lord. And they believed in the sovereignty of God while at the same time not absolving themselves of human responsibility. And therein lies an important balance between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. If you go in one direction too far or the other direction too far, you’re going to get imbalanced in your theology. But they were rooted in their understanding of the sovereignty of God and in His hand in history and the predetermined plan and all of that, while also having a good understanding of human responsibility. As they went back to Psalm 2 and talked about “why did the Gentiles rage” and the nations rage against Your anointed. Had some application for King David in the time in which it was written. But later, and certainly in Acts 4, they understand that to be a Messianic prophecy and the nations raging against the Lord’s Anointed, even Jesus Himself.

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I mean, this is a prayer that is rich in theology. It is rich in God’s Word. I just say when you’re looking for some holy chutzpah, make sure you’re standing on the Word of God in terms of how He has revealed Himself. And you’ll always find boldness there. I’ve found over the years that even in preaching my boldness increases in direct proportion to how closely I stick to the Word of God. If I drift into personal opinion and all that, I’m not as bold. I’m not as confident. But I can stand on the Word of God. I can stand on what He says. And I can always know that I’m praying the will of God when I pray the Word of God, as they did here. Their

prayers were dripping in scripture and in their understanding of who God was and how He revealed Himself and how He works in today's world. I think this contributed to their boldness.

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So if you're looking for some holy chutzpah, if you're looking for some holy boldness, pray for boldness, tether yourself to the Word of God, and then, thirdly, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Look at it in verse 8. Let's go back there, the first time Peter speaks. He is released from prison. He is standing before this supposed intimidation council. And it says, "Then Peter," verse 8, "filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..." I've underlined that phrase in my Bible, "filled with the Holy Spirit." Remember just real quickly, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, okay. All believers are baptized in the Spirit. You get the Spirit at the moment of salvation. And they were identified then as members of the body of Christ. That's the baptism of the Spirit. We're never commanded to be baptized in the Spirit, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit in the book of Ephesians. And the filling of the Spirit doesn't have to do with whether I have the Holy Spirit. It's whether the Holy Spirit has you. In that moment where you need that holy chutzpah, where you need some boldness, are you filled with the Holy Spirit? And just because you were filled yesterday doesn't mean you're filled today. Because you can grieve, quench and resist the Holy Spirit just like that. And so it's a day by day, moment by moment decision where I must yield myself to the Spirit of God. And I think if you read this story, what you find is Peter and John...they were thrown in prison the night before. And what are they probably doing? I'm just going to speculate here they were praying. They might be singing some songs of praise as Paul and Silas did when they were in prison. They're yielding themselves to the Holy Spirit. And when that moment came to speak with some holy chutzpah, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, filled up with the Spirit, prayed up and tethered to the Word of God...oh my. Look out, council, here comes Peter. And don't underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to even transform your personality that might otherwise be timid into a bold communicator for the Word of God where people go, "What is that all about? Never seen that before." And we say that a little bit when we see the Peter of the book of Acts compared to the Peter who is outside of Caiaphas's house, in a cowardly way warming his hands next to the fire pit.

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And so in verse 31, "When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." My prayer for us, friends, is that in the times in which we live, you know, that they call for the same holy chutzpah today that the church had back in the 1st century. And this isn't complicated. You pray for holy boldness. You tether yourself to the Word of God. You get filled with the Holy Spirit. And then you say, "Lord, when and where? I'm locked and loaded, and I'm ready to go." And being bold for Jesus doesn't mean you have to be ugly or difficult. Sometimes you just speak truth in a very calm kind of way, tethering yourself to God's Word, and you watch God work.

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