



How to Start a Riot

Acts 3-4

Objectives

- To describe the elements of a courageous faith and examine its effects.
- To expose those things that squelch our faith and take steps to overcome them.

Overview

There are a lot of ways to start a riot. You can use tried and true methods—yell *fire* in a theatre; declare brutal L.A. cops not guilty. Or you can be creative—heal some guy’s congenital defect, then preach the resurrection of Jesus.

Peter and John found this latter method especially effective. It’s not every day that a paraplegic gets up and walks, at least not one who’s been that way for 40 years. Heal someone like that and you’re bound to create a stir; you may even earn a spot on *Hard Copy*. But proceed to proclaim resurrection to a religious establishment that doesn’t believe in it...well, now you’ve really got something cookin’!

Peter and John were hauled in faster than you can say *turn* or *burn*. In Palestine, you’re not innocent until proven guilty. You’re guilty until proven unpunishable. Fortunately, that’s what happened to the apostles. The Sanhedrin would have liked to silence them—permanently—but they had a problem: Kill these heroes and your peaceful partiers turn into an angry mob.

So they slapped them on the wrist, said stop it, and let them go. Meanwhile, outside the courthouse, a couple thousand more people gave their lives to Jesus.

That’s a riot!

The Kingdom of God can be pretty explosive. That’s what makes it such a blast! Believers get to go around stirring things up for Jesus. Sometimes a party breaks out... people turn to Christ and all of heaven rejoices with us. At other times, a riot breaks out...people reject the Gospel and afford you the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ.

That’s the highest honor of the kingdom. If you suffer persecution, the kingdom of heaven belongs to you (Matthew 5:10). If you suffer insults, the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1Peter 4:14).

One chapter after this incident, we see the apostles rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of Christ. They weren’t stupid or short-sighted. They knew the power of a bold witness and the eternal glory that would be theirs for suffering patiently.

It often goes the same way for junior high and high school disciples. Is it hard to follow Jesus as a kid? Sure it is. Is it worth it to follow Jesus as a kid? Absolutely!

“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



Outline

The points in this outline look like typical youthworker hype. But I really believe they are universal characteristics of faith. Many of the great stories of the Bible, including those of the folks in Hebrews 11, reflect these qualities. And what worked for them will work for us!

Faith that can Start a Riot

1. It Acts Spontaneously

Peter and John did not go to the Temple intending to cause an uproar. They certainly didn't go intending to heal a lame man. It just happened! They were open to the leading of God's Spirit and acted on an opportunity He gave them.

Real faith is often spontaneous. It seizes the moment. It gives a gift, meets a need, encourages a person, and takes a chance, expecting God to work. Such faith may lead to an obvious miracle or to a subtle ministry, but either way God uses it.

2. It Speaks Outrageously

The Sadducees were the dominant ruling party in Jerusalem. Their most outstanding theological trait was their disbelief in the afterlife. Just weeks before, these people had crucified Jesus Christ. So what do Peter and James do? Right in the middle of the Temple, they start proclaiming that Jesus Christ was resurrected! That's a daily double in religious trouble...but these were men of *faith*.

Do you pipe down or pipe up about your faith? Does your belief in Jesus flow out of your mouth, even at times when your words will outrage the culture around you? Peter's and John's did, having a huge impact on the entire area.

3. It Infects Contagiously

Acts 4:4 says that Peter's message contagiously infected about 2,000 people. There were 3,000 who believed in Jesus on Pentecost; now there were 5,000! Our words and works can have the same kind of effect. The numbers may not be the same – the apostles had a special authority from God, and Peter's audience was ripe for the picking. But the results will be the same. People *will* come to Christ.

Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not be able to stand against the truth about him. Hell might struggle and fight, but the gates *will* fall. God's Word – lived and spoken – is piercing and powerful. It always has an effect.

4. It Continues Courageously

The threats of the Sanhedrin seem silly in comparison to the faith of the apostles. *You guys won't say another word about Jesus if you know what's good for you!*

Ooh! I bet they were really scared!

Peter and John blew them off without a second thought. *Not another word? Are you kidding? All we have are words about Jesus! We can't help speaking about what we've seen and heard!*

Real people of faith...the kind that spawn salvation parties and persecution riots...just keeps going. The more the heat gets turned up, the hotter their passion for Jesus grows.

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:11-12



Discussion Guide

Open

- Have any of you ever done anything bold or outrageous because of your faith? Have you ever done anything bold or outrageous *in public* because of your faith? (You may want to have a personal illustration ready, as an example)
- Are the Christians in your school more in the closet or out in the open? Explain.
- What keeps Christians from being bold and open about their faith? What pressures or fears keep them in the closet?
- If my motto were “*Be a bold, or don’t be a Christian at all*” would you agree or disagree?

Dig In

1. **Transition into your study** by introducing Peter and John as examples of bold faith in action. These men were probably a lot like us. They had a cowardly streak in their characters. They weren’t highly trained. They were just ordinary guys who had met Jesus. But we see in them the boldness that comes with real faith. People who are never bold are either immature or illegitimate Christians.
2. **Tell the story** of Acts 3-4. If you have time, choose one or two good readers to read it aloud.
3. **Discuss the situation:**
 - There are at least three or four examples of boldness in this story. What are they?
 - What do these examples tell us about boldness? In what ways should we act boldly? (Supplement student’s answers with material from the teaching outline)
 - Why do you think that both the healing and the message caused such a stir with the religious leaders?
 - The Gospel always causes a strong reaction. What were the two main reactions of the people in this story? Have you ever personally experienced either of these reactions? Explain.
 - What did the apostles pray about after their run-in with the authorities? What does their prayer tell you about the depth and maturity of their faith?

Close

1. What is the number one reason why your boldness tends to break down?
2. What personal challenge do you take from this passage? How can you be more like Peter and John?
3. What role should prayer play in making us bold? Do you think we’ve had ‘boldness breakdown’ because of a lack of prayer?
4. Pray for boldness! Pray that some of you will be able to start either a salvation party or a persecution riot in your school.