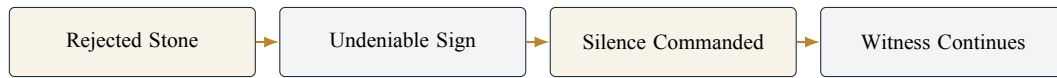


Session 16 We Cannot But Speak

Acts: The Book That Explains Everything

Session 16 | Acts 4:11-22



Before You Read

Big idea: Peter identifies the rejected Jesus as God's chosen cornerstone and the only Saviour. The council cannot deny the healing, so it tries to silence the witnesses. Peter and John answer that obedience to God requires them to speak what they have seen and heard.

Where we resume: Peter and John stand before Israel's rulers after an overnight arrest. Peter has identified Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom the rulers crucified and God raised, as the source of the healing (Acts 4:10). The healed man stands before them. Verse 11 continues Peter's answer; the change of session does not begin a new speech.

How to use this guide: Read Acts 4:11–22 alongside Acts 3:1–10 and 4:7–10. Mark **name**, **speak**, **God**, and the statements about what the rulers cannot deny. Distinguish recognizing the miracle from accepting the message it confirms.

Four movements to keep watching

- **The rejected stone and saving name (vv. 11–12):** Peter completes his answer by declaring Jesus' God-given place and exclusive saving authority.
- **Evidence the council cannot deny (vv. 13–16):** The apostles' boldness and the healed man's presence leave the rulers without a credible rebuttal.
- **A command the apostles cannot obey (vv. 17–20):** The council forbids speaking in Jesus' name; Peter and John appeal to God's higher authority.
- **Threats and release (vv. 21–22):** Public praise restrains the rulers, and Luke emphasizes the healed man's lifelong condition.

A simple right-division reminder: This is the Twelve's Jerusalem witness to Israel concerning her risen Messiah. The passage records their commission and public sign; it does not automatically prescribe identical signs or experiences for the Body of Christ today.

Acts 4:11

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

What does the passage say?

- Peter identifies Jesus as the rejected stone of Psalm 118.
- He identifies the rulers themselves as the builders who treated that stone as worthless.
- God has assigned the rejected One the chief place.

Words to notice

- **This is the stone** — The image refers to the Jesus just named in verse 10.
- **Set at nought** — Rejected or treated as having no worth.
- **Of you builders** — Peter directly confronts the leaders charged with responsibility for the people.
- **Head of the corner** — The image gives the rejected

stone the principal place in the building. Its force is God's reversal of the builders' verdict.

Cross-references worth marking

- Psalm 118:22–23 — The rejected stone becomes the head stone of the corner through the LORD's doing.
- Luke 20:17–19 — Jesus used this same Scripture where the chief priests and scribes understood His parable against them.
- 1 Peter 2:4–8 — Peter later develops the contrast between human rejection and God's choice of Christ.

Do not miss

- Religious office did not make the builders' judgment correct. Their rejection did not determine Jesus' place in God's purpose.
- **Hear the indictment.** In Peter's earlier public charges (Acts 2:23–24, 36; 3:13–15), as here in Acts 4:10–11,

the contrast is that his hearers rejected and killed Jesus, but God raised and exalted Him. For those resisting Him, this is alarming news: look whom you have rejected, and look where God has placed Him. Peter is confronting their guilt, not congratulating them for rejecting the cornerstone. Do not read past that accusation by immediately substituting Paul's later gospel formu-

lation that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). This distinction concerns the argument being made: Peter's speeches also offer forgiveness and blessing (Acts 2:38; 3:19, 26), so "bad news" describes the indictment, not every statement about Christ's death and resurrection or the whole message.

Acts 4:12

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

What does the passage say?

- Peter declares that salvation is found in no other person.
- No other saving name has been given among men under heaven.
- The need includes Peter and his hearers: "we must be saved."
- The argument reaches beyond one man's healing to the saving authority of Jesus Himself.

Words to notice

- **Neither ... any other** — Every alternative saviour is excluded. The first Greek clause combines *ouk* ("not") with *ouden* ("no one"). These negatives work together rather than cancel each other: salvation is in no one else.
- **For there is none other name** — "Neither" and "none" in the English belong to separate clauses. The second explains the first: salvation is in no other person because no other saving name has been given. The repeated negatives exclude alternatives; they do not produce a

positive statement.

- **Under heaven ... among men** — The wording gives the claim a reach beyond this one council meeting.
- **Given** — The saving name is God's provision, not the council's appointment.
- **Whereby** — By which; the name represents the person identified in verse 10.
- **Must** — Salvation through Jesus is necessary, not one optional path among others.

Cross-references worth marking

- John 14:6 — Jesus declares that access to the Father is through Him.
- Acts 2:21, 36–38 — Peter connects the Lord's saving name with the identification of Jesus as Lord and Christ.
- 1 Timothy 2:5–6 — Paul later identifies one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.

Do not miss

- Keep the Israelite audience and the universal claim together. Right division does not provide anyone with a different Saviour.
- Verse 12 names the only Saviour; it does not by itself state every later-revealed detail of Paul's gospel or establish that every administration is identical.

Acts 4:13

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

What does the passage say?

- The rulers observe Peter and John's boldness and marvel at their lack of recognized scholarly standing.
- They recognize that these men had been with Jesus. The apostles' association with Him becomes part of the coun-

cil's assessment.

- Their confidence appears in an official hearing where the hearers possess power to punish them.

Words to notice

- **Boldness** — Open, confident speech. Peter has directly identified the leaders' responsibility and Jesus' saving authority.
- **Unlearned and ignorant men** — Men without the recognized scribal training or professional standing expected by these leaders. The description does not establish inability to read, reason, or understand Scripture.

- **Took knowledge of them** — Recognized them or their association with Jesus. Luke does not explain precisely when each ruler had previously encountered them.

Cross-references worth marking

- John 7:15 — The leaders similarly questioned Jesus' learning because He had not followed their recognized course of study.
- Luke 6:12–16 — Jesus personally chose Peter and John among the Twelve.
- Acts 4:29–31 — The believers later ask for boldness,

and continue speaking God's word.

Do not miss

- This is not a commendation of ignorance or an excuse to neglect study. The apostles had received instruction from Jesus and the promised enabling of the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:8).
- "They had been with Jesus" describes an actual historical association. Its devotional significance should not replace the council's recognition of these particular witnesses.

Acts 4:14

And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

What does the passage say?

- The healed man stands with the apostles before the council.
- The rulers cannot contradict the healing while the man himself supplies visible evidence.

Words to notice

- **Beholding** — Seeing the man directly, rather than merely hearing a claim about him.
- **Standing with them** — The posture itself matters: Acts

3:2 describes him as lame from birth.

- **Nothing against it** — No credible rebuttal to the evident healing; this does not mean agreement with Peter's conclusion.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 3:7–10 — The man immediately walks, and the people recognize their familiar beggar.
- John 11:47–48 — Leaders could acknowledge Jesus' miracles while continuing to oppose Him.

Do not miss

- An objection can be silenced without the objector submitting to the truth. The council's next action shows the difference between conceding evidence and receiving its message.

Acts 4:15

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

What does the passage say?

- The council orders the witnesses to withdraw while the leaders discuss the case.
- The discussion introduces the decision quoted in verses 16–17.

Words to notice

- **Go aside out of the council** — Leave the assembled

governing body while it deliberates.

- **Conferred among themselves** — Discussed what to do privately. Luke records the reasoning behind the public order that follows.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 5:34–40 — A later hearing likewise includes removal of the apostles and discussion within the council.

Do not miss

- Luke supplies the deliberation but does not identify his source for every detail. The account does not authorize inventing particular votes, informants, or unrecorded conversations.

Acts 4:16

Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

What does the passage say?

- The rulers ask what action to take against the apostles.
- They acknowledge that a widely known miracle has occurred and that they cannot deny it.
- The public knowledge of the sign limits their options.

Words to notice

- **What shall we do to these men?** — Their deliberation concerns handling the witnesses, rather than accepting the message Peter has given.

- **A notable miracle** — A known, recognizable sign. The healing points beyond itself to Jesus' authority.
- **Manifest** — Evident or openly known. The people of Jerusalem have access to the evidence.
- **We cannot deny it** — Their own admission agrees with the visible fact of verse 14.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 3:9–10 — The crowd saw the man walking and recognized him.
- John 12:9–11 — Lazarus' presence also supplied public evidence that hostile leaders sought to suppress.

Do not miss

- The council does not dismiss this healing as a rumor or expose it as a fraud. It acknowledges the event and then seeks to restrict the witness associated with it.

Acts 4:17

But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

What does the passage say?

- The rulers decide to stop the message from spreading among the people.
- Their proposed method is a severe warning against further speech in Jesus' name.

Words to notice

- **Spread no further** — The aim is to contain the testimony and its influence.
- **Straitly threaten** — Warn strictly or severely. "Straitly"

is not "straight," a direction of travel.

- **Henceforth to no man** — From now on, to no one; the proposed restriction is comprehensive.
- **This name** — The name Peter identified in verse 10 and declared indispensable in verse 12.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 5:28 — The council later complains that the apostles have filled Jerusalem with their teaching.
- Acts 4:7, 10, 12 — The name first questioned is the name Peter identifies as the sole source of salvation.

Do not miss

- The rulers' response is suppression rather than refutation. The name they seek to prohibit is precisely the name Peter says they need.

Acts 4:18

And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

What does the passage say?

- The apostles are recalled and receive the council's formal command.
- They are forbidden both to speak and to teach in Jesus' name.

Words to notice

- **Not to speak at all nor teach** — The paired expressions exclude both proclamation and instruction.

- **In the name of Jesus** — The command targets testimony concerning Jesus and under His authority.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 1:8 — Jesus appointed the apostles to be His witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem.
- Luke 24:46–49 — The risen Lord identified them as witnesses and promised the power necessary for their commission.

Do not miss

- This is a direct conflict of commands: Jesus commissioned the witness that the council now forbids. The issue is more specific than disagreement over a meeting place or administrative rule.

Acts 4:19

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

What does the passage say?

- Peter and John answer the council together.
- They place the choice between the two commands before God and invite the rulers to judge which authority takes precedence.

Words to notice

- **Right in the sight of God** — God's judgment supplies the governing standard.
- **Hearken** — Listen with a view to obeying.
- **More than unto God** — Human authority is subordinate to God's authority.

- **Judge ye** — The apostles turn the moral question back upon the very people sitting in judgment.

Cross-references worth marking

- Daniel 3:16–18 — Faithful Israelites refuse a royal command to worship an image.
- Acts 5:29 — When the conflict recurs, Peter states the principle explicitly: obedience to God comes first.
- Romans 13:1–7 — Paul later instructs submission to governing authorities; a direct conflict with God's command should not become an excuse to disregard authority generally.

Do not miss

- The apostles appeal to an actual command from the risen Lord. Personal preference or strong feelings do not, by themselves, establish an equivalent conflict.
- Their answer is open and direct. They do not promise compliance while intending to continue secretly.

Acts 4:20

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

What does the passage say?

- The apostles explain why they cannot accept the command to be silent.
- Their testimony concerns what they have personally seen and heard.

Words to notice

- **For** — Connects this explanation to the appeal in verse 19.
- **Cannot but speak** — Cannot refrain from speaking consistently with their obligation to God. It expresses duty, not a physical inability to be quiet.

- **Seen and heard** — Their witness rests upon actual events and instruction, including their encounter with the risen Jesus.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 1:21–22 — The selection of Judas' replacement emphasizes eyewitness qualification and resurrection testimony.
- 1 John 1:1–3 — John describes the apostolic testimony in terms of hearing, seeing, and handling.

Do not miss

- The apostles are commissioned eyewitnesses. Present-day readers receive their preserved testimony; we should not claim to have personally witnessed the events that qualified the Twelve.

Acts 4:21

So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

What does the passage say?

- The council adds threats and releases the apostles.
- The public response to the healing restrains the rulers from finding a way to punish them.
- The people glorify God for what has happened.

Words to notice

- **Further threatened** — Release is accompanied by renewed intimidation, not withdrawal of the prohibition.
- **Because of the people** — The public reaction helps

explain the council's restraint.

- **All men glorified God** — Describes the general public response in view; it does not mean the resisting council has now become believing or that every resident is converted.

Cross-references worth marking

- Luke 20:19 — Leaders seeking to act against Jesus were restrained by fear of the people.
- Acts 5:26 — Later, officers avoid force because they fear the crowd.
- Acts 3:8–9 — Praise began with the healed man and became publicly visible.

Do not miss

- Release does not mean the council accepted Peter's message. The threats remain, and the next paragraph records how the believers respond to them.

For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

What does the passage say?

- Luke adds that the healed man was more than forty years old.
- Together with Acts 3:2, this identifies a disability lasting from birth through more than four decades.

Words to notice

- **For** — Explains the strength of the public response and the difficulty of dismissing the sign.
- **Above forty years old** — His age emphasizes the long-standing condition; the passage does not assign the number a symbolic meaning.

- **Miracle of healing** — The sign produced a concrete benefit in a known person.
- **Was shewed** — Was accomplished or displayed in his healing.

Cross-references worth marking

- Acts 3:2, 7–10 — Lifelong lameness, immediate strength, and public recognition establish the character of the healing.

Do not miss

- The account closes the hearing by returning to its visible evidence. The man's condition was longstanding, the change immediate, and the result publicly recognized. The sign cannot be separated from Peter's explanation of Jesus' authority.

Text And Translation Helps

- **Set at nought (v. 11)** — Treated as worthless; the builders' rejection contrasts with God's appointment.
- **Unlearned and ignorant (v. 13)** — Lacking recognized scholarly standing, not incapable of learning. Jesus had instructed these men.
- **Manifest (v. 16)** — Evident or publicly known.
- **Straitly and henceforth (v. 17)** — Strictly or severely, and from now on.
- **Hearken (v. 19)** — Listen so as to obey.
- **Cannot but speak (v. 20)** — Cannot refrain from speaking while remaining faithful to their commission.
- These are contextual explanations of the KJV's wording. They do not require substituting another translation.

Common Ideas To Test

- **"The miracle forced the rulers to believe."** They admitted the healing but prohibited the message. Recognition of evidence and submission to its meaning are distinct.
- **"Unlearned means preparation and study do not matter."** The apostles had learned from Jesus; the council's credentials were not the source of their authority.
- **"They had been with Jesus means only that they behaved kindly."** The statement concerns an actual association with Jesus amid a hearing marked by direct, challenging testimony.
- **"Acts 4 authorizes rejecting any rule we dislike."** The apostles faced a specific prohibition of a specific divine commission.
- **"The release means opposition is over."** They depart under threats. Acts 4:23–31 records the believers' prayerful response, and chapter 5 records renewed confrontation.

Session Summary

- Peter identifies the leaders as builders who rejected God's chosen cornerstone.
- The only saving name belongs to the risen Jesus whom they rejected.
- The healed man stands beside the witnesses, and the rulers admit that they cannot deny the sign.
- The council attempts to stop the testimony by forbidding speech and teaching in Jesus' name.
- Peter and John appeal to God's higher authority and their responsibility as witnesses.
- Public praise restrains punishment, but release comes with further threats.

For Long-Term Study

Mark these themes as Acts unfolds

- The difference between admitting a sign and accepting its God-given meaning.
- Jesus' name as the focus of healing, salvation, proclamation, and opposition.
- The apostles' eyewitness commission and their dependence upon God's authority.
- The differing responses of Israel's rulers, the public, and the believing remnant.

Questions to keep asking

1. How does Psalm 118 explain the contrast between the rulers' verdict and God's verdict concerning Jesus?

2. What do the leaders recognize in verses 13–16, and what do they refuse to permit in verses 17–18?
3. Why is the healed man's presence important throughout the hearing?
4. What makes the command to be silent a direct conflict with God's instruction?
5. How does "seen and heard" distinguish the apostles' testimony from religious speculation?
6. Why does Luke conclude with the man's age?

One sentence to remember

The rulers cannot deny the sign but command silence about the Saviour, while Peter and John answer that God's authority requires them to continue their eyewitness testimony.