

# True Christian Courage

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn with me now for a little time as we meditate together in a portion we have read from the Word of God in the Acts of the Apostles and the fourth chapter.

And reading again from verse 19, the reply of the Apostles, Peter and John, to a very improper instruction given to them.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, that is to the Jewish council, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

We have the Church of God, my friends, in action before us in these chapters of Scripture.

We have a classical instance of the gospel of the grace of God advancing mightily and the most vehement opposition being displayed from men to that gospel.

[ 1 : 22 ] The immediate cause of the opposition in this instance was, as we saw in our reading and in a previous chapter, was the miracle that the Apostles had wrought upon an impotent man.

This was still the age of miracles. We acknowledge that the miracles in the Church ceased with the Apostles, with the Apostolic Age.

Once the gospel was established, then normality came into the affairs of the Church. And so we still are faced here before us with the age of miracles.

A poor paralytic who was sitting outside the temple at Jerusalem, begging, had been restored to health and strength in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this miracle very clearly had a snowballing effect. God used it to stimulate even greater interest in the gospel, so much so that the religious leaders of the day became greatly alarmed and resolved, if possible, to put a stop to it all.

[ 2 : 47 ] When opposition and persecution arises against the gospel, one may be certain that the adversary is becoming alarmed and a real work of grace is taking place.

This has frequently happened in the course of history, and it is happening in many parts of the world in this very day. But the Apostles were not to be intimidated, and they were not to be silenced, and Peter, acting here as spokesman, answered and said, Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he was made whole, Be it known unto you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him, does this man stand before you whole.

And they took the opportunity presented to them in here, in the very lair of the enemies of Christ, to preach the saving and redeeming gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, they said, is the stone which was set at naught of you builders. What an awesome indictment this was.

What a terrifying position to be in, by men who were in positions of responsibility before God. The very people who should be engaged heartily in building up the cause of truth, were the most vehement dismantlers of that cause.

[ 4 : 44 ] Disowning it by all the means in their power. This is surely a matter that should cause ourselves a great deal of heart searching.

We should never assume that all is well within our borders, as a denomination or as a people. We should never be complacent with how things are with us.

And we should ever be seeking to know and to be assured that we are indeed propagating the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then Peter here proceeds, Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved.

And among other things surely we see in this answer and in the way in which these men met their enemies, met with the enemies of the gospel, we see true Christian courage in action.

[ 5 : 51 ] True Christian courage manifesting itself in their conduct in relation to the gospel. And so we ask ourselves, and I think we hide it in the context, we ask ourselves what are the characteristics of true Christian courage.

How does true Christian courage, how does it manifest itself in men who are called of God to engage in the work of God?

Well, there are certain aspects of the witness of these men, I think, that calls for our attention. You will notice at the very outset that they were exceedingly courteous.

In the manner in which they spoke to the enemies of Christ, the enemies of the gospel, they were altogether courteous. Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel.

This is indeed what these men were. Whatever this council was in its individual members, the apostles are here remembering that they belonged to a godly succession.

[ 7 : 07 ] God was allowing them to speak in his name. Whatever they were in their hearts before God, the apostles are giving them a place of honor.

And they approached them with all due courtesy. You see, Christian courage, my dear friends, it doesn't consist in bravado and bluster and goodness on the part of those who are the advocates of the truth.

To speak the truth boldly, one need not be a bore or a bear. The followers of Jesus and the Christian believer should know nothing of discourtesy.

When presenting the claims of Jesus Christ and bringing before men their obligation before God, we are reminded that it is Peter himself who speaks afterwards in one of his letters, in his first letter, chapter 3 and at verse 8, and exhorts the Christians in that day and says, finally, be all of one mind, be pitiful, be courteous.

And this indeed is what he was himself in all circumstances when presenting the claims of Jesus Christ. Through Christian courage will demonstrate itself in courteousness.

[ 8 : 37 ] But another characteristic of Christian courage is noticeable also in the fact that these men were prudent in presenting the claims of the gospel.

They didn't rush, so to speak, in order to make martyrs of themselves on the spur of the moment. The courteous address which they addressed, the counsel is immediately followed by a reference to the good deed which had been done to the impotent man.

The apostles, you see, remind them, if indeed they needed to be reminded of it, that the deed was a good one. The actual miracle could only command gratitude and joy and happiness among the people in general.

And that these words had a sobering effect on the counsel is evident, I think, from verse 14, where we read, And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

They recognized that it was a good deed. And it seemed to us, at least, that the prudence of grace comes out in the way in which these men are presenting the claims of the gospel of divine grace.

[ 10 : 08 ] But yet a characteristic also of Christian courage is that they were supremely honest. And they were frank. For when the counsel demanded by what authority, or in whose name they had done this miracle, they got an instant and frank reply to their question, by the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

There is no beating about the bush in Christian courage. There is no duplicity on their part as they present their case.

There is no deviousness with them. It is a very essence, Christian, their reply is a very essence of frankness.

It will wear no masks. Christian courage will wear no masks. It will state no half-truths. It will utter no uncertainties to those whom it is addressing.

The temptation to be compromisingly politic finds no place in the actions of the courage wrought by the Spirit of God.

[ 11 : 15 ] And it truly is something that as individuals and as a church, we ought to remind ourselves of in a day when there is so much of this in every other sphere of life and of behavior.

But then there is another characteristic also. And that is their faithfulness. They were utterly faithful even to the point of being blunt without being discourteous or rude.

These men before them, this council before them, were men who had souls on the way to eternity. It was absolutely imperative that they should know precisely where they stood in relation to God and their standing before him.

The burden of guilt which lay on them as answerable men. The condemnation to which they were subjected as those whom God had so signally blessed.

And so very pointedly and very directly they are told that Jesus Christ is the stone which they had rejected and which had become the head of the corner.

[ 12 : 31 ] And that there is no salvation in any other. Neither is there any other name under heaven given amongst men whereby they must be saved.

And so they are utterly faithful to the souls of these men before them. Just as they were to the multitude before whom they preached a little time before this.

And so we would seek to emulate, my friends, the faithfulness of these men. And by the grace of God we would seek to say to you, as we trust we have always said, that this is indeed the stone of offense.

And that this is the only name under heaven given amongst men whereby you must be saved. You will not find salvation anywhere else.

And if you reject the stone of offense, the Christ of God, then you are in effect damning your own soul. There is none other name.

[ 13 : 37 ] And there is no other way by which sinners can be delivered from the bondage of corruption. So we see the characteristics of true Christian courage and how true Christian courage will demonstrate itself at every point.

Not just in the preaching of the word, but in the living of the Christian life in putting into effect the ethos of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But then we go on to notice the effect which this had on the enemies of the gospel. You see, such a witness as was borne by the apostles in this instance couldn't but produce a response of some sort in these men.

Just as their preaching had produced a magnificent response a little time before this, at Pentecost, when 3,000 were added to the church, their witness here couldn't but produce some response.

And we certainly find this happening. It is interesting to see the varying stages through which those men passed in the response to what the apostles were saying to them.

[ 14 : 56 ] It is, I think, worthy of note that there can never be a non-responsive attitude to the gospel. In other words, there must be a pro or a nanti response to the gospel of the grace of God as it is proclaimed to men and women.

The first thing we see in the response of these men is that they were simply bewildered. For that in effect is what these words in verse 13 suppose, they marveled.

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled. They were bewildered, in other words.

They were puzzled beyond measure. Whence did this boldness on the part of these men come from? These men, they had no learning, they had no culture, no standing of any significance in society, no academic or rabbinic training.

And so they were bewildered, they were astonished. These men were unread in the great learning of the fathers and the traditions of the elders.

[ 16 : 12 ] What was the source of their boldness and courage and knowledge? Where did their inspiration come from? Now it should not at all surprise us if we are misunderstood and if we are misinterpreted by the world that sits in darkness knowing not the things of God.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that the church of God should be obscuratist in presenting the claims of the gospel or that it shouldn't attempt to make things, to make the message of the gospel as clear as it is possible to make it.

But when all is said and done, remember it is only God's Spirit who can give men understanding of the deep things of God. And until God's Spirit does this, men will remain bewildered as these men were.

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled, they were bewildered, they were puzzled, they didn't know what to think.

But then too, we notice that in the response to the message of these men, we see that they were challenged for they were compelled to see a similarity in these men to the person and to the name which they abhorred more than any other, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 17 : 52 ] We read that they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. This certainly would seem to suggest that at least some of these men in a Jewish council had a first-hand acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ and could vividly recall him and recall his earthly ministry and perhaps could recall his trial before Pontius Pilate.

And now they were seeing his image being, as it were, resurrected before their very eyes in these men. In other words, conscience was doing his own work in them.

God was still being gracious to them in that the general convictions of his spirit were being felt by them. They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

Now, my dear friend, my Christian friend, can this be said of you and can this be said of me? That I think is a personal challenge that comes to the people of God in relation to the world of men around us, the world of men in which we move.

The people will rub shoulders with day by day. Can they turn round and say one to the other? There we see the image of the Lord Jesus Christ in that man, in that woman.

[ 19 : 23 ] We are bound to take knowledge that that man, that that woman, has been with Jesus. It is an awesome challenge that comes to all the people of God without exception.

And these ungodly men were challenged in this regard, that they saw Jesus Christ in the conduct of his people here.

But then from that we notice that the witness of the apostles also had this effect in that they were silenced.

For we read in verse 14 that they could say nothing against it. That is, the miracle which had been done on the paralytic, as we already indicated, they could find no fault with that miracle, with that work.

Indeed, the very same thing is true of the accusation which Peter had just made against them, with reference to their treatment and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 34 ] They could say nothing against it, for they were condemned in their own consciences. A sullen silence now reigns throughout the court, and the proud doctors of Jerusalem feel that they had been judged instead of sitting in judgment and passing sentence as they intended to do.

The gospel always brings about the one or the other. It either brings about the silence of resentment or the silence of repentance.

It must bring about the one or the other. And so, my friend, ask yourself, what effect is it producing in your own mind and in your own life?

They were silenced, these men. But sadly, we have to go a step further, and we see also that it had this effect on them, that they were hardened, clearly demonstrating that their silence was a silence of resentment, a bitter and deep resentment.

to the gospel of the grace of God, stung to the quick by the truths which had been spoken to them, and convicted and condemned by their own conscience.

[ 22 : 01 ] They could think of nothing else but revenge upon these men of God. You see, the gospel had proved, at this juncture at least, it had proved in their case to be a savor of death and to death for these men.

And it must be either the one or the other. There can be no neutrality insofar as the truth of God is concerned and the gospel of his salvation.

No man can sit on the fence. No man can remain indifferent. He must either bow before or rebel against. Christ. And sadly, it is the latter that we are seeing happening here.

How long, my dear friend, have you been rebelling against the gospel of the grace of God? How long have you remained in unbelief with reference to this challenging message of the Christ of God presented to you freely and fully in the gospel?

Is it being a savor of life unto life or is it being a savor of death unto death? It must be the one or the other. There is no middle course so far as the gospel of reconciling grace is concerned.

[ 23 : 28 ] It must be either hardening us into total insensitivity or bringing the sensitiveness of the grace of God to bear upon our hearts and our lives day by day.

A savor of life or a savor of death. But then too we notice here the effect which their witness produced on the friends of the gospel.

In other words the effect which it produced on themselves and on those who were like minded with them. For we read together that being let go they went to their own company and we see from the chapter their reaction and response to what had taken place at this particular time.

And I think this is important because we ought to have it always at the back of our minds what kind of response the gospel has and the effect that may have on ourselves.

You see for one thing they recognized that opposition to the gospel was inevitable. For this is what the holy scripture said would happen and they proceed here in the chapter to quote from Psalm 2.

[ 25 : 06 ] Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.

They must not therefore be surprised as Peter himself says afterwards in one of his letters in his first letter and chapter four at the fiery trial which was come to try them as if some strange thing had happened to them.

They weren't bewildered by events because their feet were firmly placed on the infallible rock of divine truth and they knew that opposition was inevitable when the gospel of God's grace was proclaimed.

They knew what was in the heart of man and that apart from the regenerating activity of God's grace, men would remain enemies and therefore opposition would continue.

God's grace alone can overcome that opposition in the natural heart to the gospel. So you see, they recognized this. They had this at the back of their mind.

[ 26 : 19 ] this helped to strengthen and stimulate their faith. Not that it didn't sadden them, of course it did, as it must sadden anyone, but they recognized that opposition was inevitable because of the very nature of man and the very nature of sin.

But that was not all. We see also in these verses that they committed their case anew to God. And they said, now Lord, behold their threatenings.

Verse 29. You see, they are not calling down the divine vengeance or dictating to God what he should do in these particular circumstances.

They are not presuming to know better than God himself or imagining that they have the wisdom to deal with this problem with which they are confronted.

They are requesting that God should make matters easier for themselves or that he should remove these men from the scene altogether. All they are doing is wisely committing the kiss into the hands of God in the confidence and with the assurance that he will deal with their threatenings in his own good and perfect way.

[ 27 : 45 ] He knows how to deal with their threatenings as he knows how to deal with every problem that may confront you and me in the course of our witness and of our living.

And so they committed their kiss anew to God. But it was not all. We see also that they sought grace themselves to be faithful.

Ah, but were they not faithful already? They were indeed. But they recognized that they needed a renewal of that grace. They appreciated that it was by grace alone that they could be faithful.

And so in verse 29 we hear them again, grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak the word. They are very aware of the fact that they are facing a crisis situation.

And they themselves do not have the necessary resources to handle this situation. They are sensible of weakness and they are perhaps filled with fear and with trepidation.

[ 28 : 51 ] And as they see the opposition mounting and the possible outcome which this would have for themselves. And so they recognized the imperativeness of the continuance of the grace of God upon them.

It was by grace that they had already stood. It is by grace that they would continue to stand in all that lay before them. And along with all this we find also that they implored for God's own special intervention by stretching forth they said thine hand so that wonders may be done in the name of thy holy child Jesus.

The whole passage demonstrates the totality of the reliance of these men on the intervention of God on the power of God if signs and if wonders were to be continued as they had already commenced if they were to be continued in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

it was because the power of God had already rested upon themselves that they were able to acquit themselves with such credit before the council.

For verse 8 relates that Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost and what is the Holy Ghost but the power of God operating in and operating through the people of God.

[ 30 : 23 ] This is how God intervenes in his church and this is how God demonstrates his power in his believing church in the world. While he can indeed work above means or without means he invariably works through means through frail instruments human instruments God hath chosen the weak things of the world and things which are not to bring to naught things that are.

The church here is acutely conscious of the fact that without God she can do nothing. Word to God that this consciousness that this awareness gripped ourselves my friends on the eve of a general assembly and word to God that it were brought home to us with greater forcefulness so that in his name and in his power we would go forth.

And so my dear friends where do you stand? in relation to this work and this witness. I say what is the quality of your witness?

What is the quality of my witness? Does it have the characteristic of true balanced Christian courage as we have in endeavouring to say?

Are we firmly footed God's God's word? God's word revealed to us but also in the spirit and in the attitude which we should project in our witness before men and to men.

[ 32 : 04 ] There is a quality that stems from the operation of the grace of God. A quality that stems from the power of the spirit of God resting upon and dwelling in the people of God.

And there is a very different quality that stems from self. God forbid that the latter should be the quality that would demonstrate itself in us.

rather would we cover the former. The quality that stems from the unctioing grace of God's spirit resting upon our souls resting upon our witness.

What is the quality I ask of your witness? What is the effect of your witness and of mine? Or is it perhaps not having any effect at all so far as we can deserve?

I would not wish to say anything that might discourage any dear soul in this respect or cause them to conclude that they are quite ineffective so far as witnessing for Christ is concerned.

[ 33 : 16 ] But all of us have to constantly reassess ourselves in the light of this matter. How we are projecting the witness of the gospel in our lives.

this clearly is what was happening here. The witness of these men had a salutary effect on others and it also very clearly had a salutary effect on themselves and those around them.

And last of all what is the relation in which you stand to the one who is the center of it all?

The rock of offense, the Lord Jesus Christ, the stone of stumbling who became the head cornerstone. Where do you stand in relation to him?

that was the very heart of the message of these men of God, of these apostles of God. Even as they presented the reasonableness of what they had done to the enemies of the gospel, they were determined that the essence of their message should be presented to those men in the hope and no doubt with the prayer, that God would bless it to them.

[ 34 : 52 ] Neither, they said, is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved.

My friend, do you have him as the savior of your soul? How you by the grace of God embraced and received the Lord Jesus Christ?

There is no other savior, there is no other way, there is no other deliverer. If you reject him, you reject life, you reject hope, you reject heaven, you damn, as we said already, your own soul.

Come unto me, he says, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest.

And to you so, God grant that this rest will be found by you, by all of us here, and by countless others this evening, to the end of the world.

[ 36 : 04 ] Amen. May God add his name.