

MEN OF COURAGE

Acts 3:1-10

After the day of Pentecost the disciples had the power and the courage to live for God and face the daily grind of life. What a sense of relief that must have been for the disciples. Now they can finally stand on their own two feet and live for God.

What do we as Christians have that we can give and share with our fellow men? What can God's people give to a needy sin sick world? Can we really make any difference at all in other lives? You may not have a lot of money to give others, but you have something far more valuable than money. You possess the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in your heart that you can share with the people. How many of us could identify with Peter and John and say, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you?" You can share with them about your life in Christ and what a differences He has made since you became a Christian.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and believers in the upper room, He gave them the boldness and courage to stand up for Christ and be counted. At one time the disciples could be correctly be pictured as a group of cowards and wimps. Certainly their actions surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection were nothing to be proud of. They totally abandoned Jesus in His hour of need. They were nowhere to be found supporting Him as He was unjustly arrested and convicted. However, in

just a short time later a transformation came over the believers when the Holy Spirit filled their hearts with strength and power.

Now you can accurately describe them as men of courage. Now they can stand up against the pressures of life. The Holy Spirit enabled the believers to be courageous. I want to challenge each of us to be courageous in our Christian walk this week. Are there any reasons for us to be a weakling and not stand up for Christ? I don't believe so.

In the scripture that I read to you, we have a great story about the courage of two disciples, Peter and John. As the scripture read reveals they were on their way to the Temple as usual on the Sabbath. Although Peter and John no longer adhered to the Jewish faith, they continue to adhere to the practice of prayer and minister to any Jews who would listen. In society in general it was evident that the religious people cared about the unfortunate, those who were crippled and lame. This has always been so down through the ages. Thus, their relatives made a practice of carrying them to the Temple area every day so they could ask for a donation from those going into the Temple. By the Gate Beautiful a certain lame man was placed each day. On this particular day he happened to ask Peter and John for a donation as they passed by on their way to prayer. Like many people they did not have a lot of money. Most people probably would have walked by and not said anything, but not Peter and John that day. This day the Holy Spirit must have spoken to Peter's heart. It is true you don't have money but you do have the power of God's Holy Spirit.

It is a weakness of mankind to sometime look at what we don't have rather than what we have. Give them what you have! In the name of Jesus Christ, Peter healed this lame man.

This was one miracle that could not be hidden from the public very long. All the local residents knew this lame man who had lived here all his life. They were also well acquainted with his mother and father. There was not a doubt that he was born lame. He had never walked in his entire life. There could be no mistaken identity. This was the lame man, but now he was made healthy in just a twinkle of an eye. His crippled body was made well, something the medical profession of his day could never accomplish. Other worshipers begin to gather around as this man entered the Temple and begin to celebrate his new found health. Can you blame him? He jumped around and praised God. Excitement filled the air. People were wondering what had really happened?

To make matters worse, Peter had one fault, that is, where a crowd gathered, he could not help himself, but seized the opportunity to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Temple police begin to get a little nervous. They did not want a riot and especially they did not want someone preaching about Jesus in the Temple of all places. Thus, Peter and John were quickly arrested by the Temple police. They hoped this would bring a halt to this gathering crowd and settle this issue down.

Soon Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin. Keep in mind that a few months ago, this same Sanhedrin illegally had Jesus

arrested and convinced the Romans it was in their best interest to sentence Him to death on the cross. They were in no way sympathetic to this "Jesus Movement." They had hoped their previous action would have stamped out this movement. I don't believe their feelings would have been very friendly. To even mention the name of Jesus in the Temple would make them irate. It was to this hostile group though that Peter and John stood before and proclaimed Jesus Christ. I can hear Peter now giving short and blunt answers to the questions that the Sanhedrin was asking. Did you heal this man? Peter would say NO, Jesus the man you crucified healed him! Ouch! Peter may have at one time denied his Lord, but never again would he be such a coward.

What could the Sanhedrin do in this case? Talk about being in a tight spot and up the creek without a paddle. They had their backs against the wall and nowhere to turn. What could they do without looking stupid? There was the healed man, alive and well. They all knew him personally and knew of his previous physical condition. Peter and John declared that Jesus healed him. Their reply was, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Peter and John defied the Sanhedrin right to their faces. We are going to do what God wants, not what you want. What a demonstration of courage! Certainly they were men of courage now. You might ask, what is courage?

I. COURAGE IS AN ACT DONE IN SPITE OF KNOWN CONSEQUENCES

There are two types of courage in the world. One that stands up but doesn't know ahead of time what might be the consequences of his action. He is courageous but does not know the penalty that might come. The second one is the courage that stands up knowing full well ahead of time what consequences might follow. Peter and John had this kind of courage because they knew the power of the Sanhedrin and what they had just done to Jesus. The Sanhedrin would not hesitate to do the same with them.

There are many Christians down through the ages who have exhibited this kind of courage. Many early martyrs were made to watch as their friends or family were tortured and executed right before their eyes. Yet knowing what was coming to them, they would still not deny Jesus.

We need to stand up for Jesus today, knowing full well that the world will not understand us. They will mock us or makes us look like we don't really care about the needs at hand or that we are out of touch with reality.

Today, it takes courage to live for Christ. If we do what is right we know certain consequences will follow. Unless you follow your peers into sins of all kinds, they will soon drop you and ridicule you. It takes courage to press on knowing what they will do. You may be passed over for job promotions or simply unjustly treated.

In the end times when the mark of the beast is required to buy and sell, it will take a lot of courage for Christians to stay true to Jesus Christ.

II. IT TAKES COURAGE TO ACT IN THE FACE OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Peter and John should have felt very insignificant in front of these powerful men; after all, they were only fisherman, common everyday men. They did not have any earned educational degrees, or social standing. The Sanhedrin referred to them as "uneducated, common men." They possessed no social status in the community. They were not important people as far as society was concerned.

On the other hand, all the men who made up the Sanhedrin were all well-educated and intellectual men in society. They were men of social prestige and wealth, the doctors, PhD's and society's high class of their day. You notice this was not a great concern to Peter and John. They did not let the Sanhedrin intimidate them. Peter and John were only concerned with what Jesus thought of them, not what the Sanhedrin thought of them. We need to sort out what is important in life.

Important people in society are not as important as God.

In the days of the Reformation, Martin Luther, was called to the city of Worms to answer for his faith. He was only a monk, a common priest of his day. He had no prestige and no influence with the high ruling ranks of the church officials. He was warned by friends that these high ranking churchmen could ruin his reputation. They had the power to pass

around a bad report on his activities. Thus, he might never be given another assignment in the church. Yet, Martin Luther stood firm on the truth he had discovered in the Bible, that a person is justified by faith. Man does not depend on the forgiveness of an earthly priest. His actions said I'm not afraid of my rank and file in the church.

Sometimes our courage will be matched against people who are very powerful and influential people.

III. COURAGE TO ACT COMES FROM CERTAINTY AND CONFIDENCE

Peter and John were sure of what they were doing. This makes the battle so much easier. They honestly told the Sanhedrin, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." They were acting on personal knowledge and not second hand experience. They knew the power of Jesus Christ. They had discovered who Jesus is. He was the Messiah, the one the Jews were looking for and expecting but did not believe the Jesus was the one. There were no doubts in their mind. This boosted their courage and faith. The Holy Spirit had complete control of their heart and life.

CONCLUSION

Courage is a very vital part of our Christian life. It reveals that we are finally standing on our own conviction and beliefs. Courage says this is what I believe. It is more than a creed of the church. It reveals that

we have really chosen to live for God and He lives within our heart.

Martin Luther said, "Here I Stand, I cannot recant, I will not violate the truth." Peter and John were more convinced than ever that Jesus was worth dying for. They had the courage to live for Him. I trust we would have that same courage in our lives today.

We need to ask ourselves, do we have courage like Peter and John? Will we focus on what we do have rather than what we don't have? At times people do need financial help but they can always use spiritual help. No one has received too much spiritual encouragement and directions. Nanaimo needs Christian people who will share the good news of the Gospel. Let us be Christians of courage in these days in which we live?