

Courage in the Gospel

When Honorius was emperor of Rome, about the year A.D. 400, the great Coliseum of Rome was often filled to overflowing with spectators. These had come from far and near to view the state games. Part of the sport consisted in watching as human beings battled with wild beasts or against one another until one or the other was killed. The assembled multitude made Roman holiday of such sport and found its highest delight in the death of a human being. It was on such a day when the vast crowd was watching the contest that a Syrian monk by the name of Telemachus stood up in the vast arena. Telemachus was torn by the utter disregard for the value of human life and so he leaped into the arena in the midst of the gladiatorial show and cried out, "This thing is not right! This thing must stop!" Because he was interfering with their pleasure, the authorities gave the command for Telemachus to be run through with a sword, which was done. Thus he died, but dying he kindled a flame in the hearts and consciences of thinking persons. History records that because of this within a few months the gladiatorial combats began to decline and very shortly they passed from history. Why? Because one man dared to speak out for what he felt was right.

Philippians 1: 12 – 30

1) Courage to suffer for Christ's sake

- People have the courage and resolve to suffer for ideologies that they believe in
 - Muslims suffer for their causes
 - Catholics endure much suffering whilst doing penance
 - The list can go on
- The fact is that real belief in something – whether true or not – will drive people to extreme measures to hold on to that belief or to stand for it.
 - It is unfortunate that so many people go to such extremes believing in something that is not true.
- When we believe in the Gospel, which is the truth, how much should we be emboldened to stand up for the truth knowing that the eternity of all people and the glory of God rests on it.
 - Acts 4: 13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.
 - Peter and John had the courage to stand up and proclaim the Gospel and courageously faced the religious leaders regardless of the consequences
 - The threats of the religious leaders didn't stop them
 - Acts 4: 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
 - Paul preached the Gospel boldly and he ended up in prison for it
- Many of the men of faith in Hebrews 11 suffered for their faith because their faith was such that it moved them to think, act and work differently to the world around them. Moses is one example:
 - Hebrews 11: 24 – 27 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short

time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

- There are various sources and reasons for suffering for the Gospel
 - Jealousy of other non-Christian religious leaders
 - Envy and rivalry of Christian leaders (v.15)
 - Selfish ambition (v.17)
- Whatever the reason rejoice that Christ is preached

2) The motivation for courage in the Gospel

- To live is Christ and to die is gain (v. 21)
- When we believed in Jesus we died to our old self and became a new person
 - Galatians 2: 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.
 - 2 Corinthians 5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
- We need to recognise that without Christ we don't have life at all – our only life is in Him and He in us is our life
- His life is eternal and we ought to take hold of the fact that as long as He is alive we can face anything
 - He has given us eternal life – we don't need to fear death
 - He has forgiven our sins – we don't need to fear be shamed
 - He has promised to be with us to the end of the age – we don't need to fear being forsaken
 - He has filled us with the power of the Holy Spirit – we don't need to fear being unable to do what He wants us to do
- Paul revealed his attitude in the 2 options
 - If I go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labour.
 - If I die I will be with Christ – which is far better
- Paul was absolutely confident in His faith and in His relationship with Christ that he considered going to be with Christ far better than living in the body
 - How strong is our relationship with Christ and how much do we love him that we can say the same thing with the same confidence?
 - Either way it is a giving all for the sake of the Gospel whether in this body and bearing fruit who going to be with the Lord

3) The outcome of courage in the Gospel

- Our courage encourages others who were fearful and timid to speak the word of God courageously and fearlessly (v. 14)
 - When Jonathan and his armour bearer went up against the Philistines while the rest of the Israelite army stayed behind in fear it emboldened the rest to come out of hiding and go into battle and defeat the Philistine army (1 Samuel 14)
 - Our actions always affect someone else
- Believers will stand firm in the Gospel and contend for the faith without fear of those who oppose them (v. 27 – 28)
- Other believers will also be willing to face sufferings for the sake of Christ (v. 29 – 30)