

It Is Written

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COURAGEOUS FAITH

By Paul Earnhart

For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline. Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God..." (2 Timothy 1:7-8)

The Prussian king Frederick the Great was widely known as an agnostic. In striking contrast, one of his most trusted officers, General Von Zeeland, was a deeply convicted believer. It is reported that during a very festive gathering of his general staff, the king created uproarious laughter with his crude jokes about the Son of God. Finally, after enduring this with much patience, Von Zeeland arose quietly and addressed the king: "Sire, you know that I have not feared death. I have fought and won 38 battles for you. I am an old man; I shall soon have to go into the presence of one greater than you, the mighty God who saved me from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you are blaspheming. I salute you, sire, as an old man who loves his Saviour, on the edge of eternity."

The room went deathly still, and with a trembling voice the king replied, "General Von Zeeland - I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!" and with that the party quietly ended.

It took courage for an old Prussian general to stand alone before his king and amidst his scoffing fellow officers and announce boldly and without shame his own deep faith in that God and His Son whom they were blaspheming, but that is just the kind of faith which being a follower of Christ requires. We cannot serve Him and be ashamed of Him, no matter what the odds or the dangers.

So many have stood entirely alone in defense of their confidence in the true God. Noah is a remarkable example. It is difficult to conceive the loneliness of being, with your family, the only one on earth who genuinely believed in God. (This may have included his father, Lamech, and grandfather, Methuselah, who, if the genealogy is complete, died just before the flood.) But Noah was not only steadfast, he was bold, preaching earnestly to warn his contemporaries of a rapidly approaching disaster (2 Peter 2:5) - and at last, in the final 100 years before the deluge, rearing three sons who shared his singular faith so strongly that they were able to convert their wives (2 Pet. 2:5). What laughter and contempt his boat and his preaching must have provoked can be easily imagined. Noah's was a faith that blossomed in a spiritual desert against incredible odds.

Abraham was a kindred spirit. What amusement and disdain must have followed him out of Ur of the Chaldees as he left that pagan, but prosperous, city to go to some place about which he knew absolutely nothing! The only explanation he could offer was that he went at the behest of the true and living God, risking everything on His promises. Folks that worshipped the likes of Nannar the moon-god would not have been much impressed. Abraham was all alone in his faith, a solitary figure walking out on apparent thin air. It is no marvel that he is called "the father of the faithful."

And then there is Joseph - friendless in Egypt, with the vivid memory of his brothers' hate and the heartbreak of a presumed abandonment by his once doting father. He could easily have felt forsaken by God as well - all those dreams and visions, and now this! Whether Potiphar's wife was a beauty or a hag is not stated by Moses, but the young Joseph, in the flower of his manhood and perhaps on the edge of despair, was certainly vulnerable to her seductions. We marvel, therefore, at the courage

of his lonely, but unyielding, faith when he resists her with the words: "...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

(Genesis 39:9). How he honored the God of his fathers!

And finally there is Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Jeremiah and Daniel and the "three Hebrew children" and John the Baptist and the Twelve and Paul. The list is long. But our names need to be added to it. We need a holy boldness about God and His Son as we live amidst a perverse generation - an open and unashamed conviction that attaches itself not only to who Jesus is, but to what He says - "the testimony of the Lord."

There is a very good reason why we need to be uncomfortable with a faith that fades and wilts and falls back at the first hint of social disapproval. Jesus said, "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father and with his holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Must we have a supportive crowd before our convictions find a voice, or do we have the courage to speak up for Christ and the gospel even when we stand alone? It is a critical question which all of us must honestly face.

Repent, For the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand

By Paul Earnhart

After Jesus made the journey to Judea where he met Nicodemus and preached and baptized with great success, He returned to Galilee where He had grown up. And Matthew 4:17 reports that "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" This was precisely what John the Baptist had been preaching in the wilderness, Matthew 3:1-2.

This message of Jesus (and of John) gives us a clue as to the kind of kingdom that was to be established. The Jews were expecting an earthly political kingdom. At the time, they were under the domination of Rome. They hoped that the Messiah would overthrow the Roman government and establish Jerusalem as the capital of the world. If this had been the kind of kingdom to be established, Jesus and John would have said, "Arm yourselves, learn to use your weapons, get yourselves into condition, for the battle will soon begin to establish the kingdom of God among men." But this was not what Jesus said.

Rather, Jesus and John said REPENT. The kingdom was to be a kingdom of righteousness. It was to be made up of individuals who had left the service of Satan to yield themselves completely to the authority of God. This required a change of heart, and that's what repentance is. This was the reason Jesus told Nicodemus that he would have to be born again to enter the kingdom, John 3:3-5. He would have to be changed within and without.

Many people today express an interest in the kingdom of God. Their attention, however, is riveted on the Near East and the political and military events that take place there. That's the wrong place for our concerns to be centered. Our concern must be with our own hearts—getting them right with God through repentance. We must be born again. That is the condition of our acceptance into the kingdom. That is where the kingdom must exist—within us!