

COURAGE TO LIVE

Acts 4:1-7

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I think I remember telling some of you of my experience of playing backyard mechanic a few years ago:

The water pump went out on the car.

So I replaced it. (New coolant/anti-freeze added)

In doing so I broke the radiator when I tried too aggressively to attach the top hose.

I pulled the radiator out and took it to be repaired.

I then added new coolant/Anti-freeze.

I put it back in and attached the hoses only to start the car and find that one of the hoses was not properly placed and the fan hit it splitting the hose -dumping most of my anti-freeze.

That folks happened on one day.

Ever feel like giving up?

Oh, all of us face the frustrating things of life from time to time BUT what about when they aren't frustrations but real crises?

What about when it is a marriage that is crumbling, or a spouse or child that is fatally ill or it is that life has totally lost its color?

When you struggle day after day through some of those experiences feeling like you have worn down to nothing - then you know the temptation to just give up. p 20 from Encourage Me by Swindoll

If ever there were two people who had reason to quit, to check out, to give in it was Peter and John in the situation in which we find them in Acts 4. Please open your Bible to the passage that describes their predicament.

Acts 4:1-7 "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening,

they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. ⁵ The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

In chapter three we read about an almost unbelievable event taking place. Peter and John had approached the Temple area in Jerusalem toward evening to pray. There a crippled man asked them for money. Peter and John having no money instead offered the man healing. He accepted and though he had not walked ever in his 40 year life, he now was walking and jumping all around Peter and John - ecstatic over what had happened.

As you can imagine, a crowd gathered, and Peter took advantage of the situation and preached a sermon.

He told them that this healing had come through Jesus, the very one they had killed only weeks before.

And what they, the audience, needed to do was repent of their attitude toward Jesus and turn to Him for their salvation.

Many were so taken by the miracle, and so convicted of the truth of what Peter said that they responded and trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of life.

Now in Chapter 4 we learn that some of the leaders of the land, the religious leaders and the political heavyweights, arrested Peter and John but because it was too late to interrogate them, they threw them in prison.

The next day they were brought before the court.

Now I think there is instruction in recognizing the make-up of this court: If you will check it out in your Bible you will discover that this is the same group of men who just about two months earlier had Jesus standing in the same place.

As Peter and John looked at the faces of their interrogators they saw the same angry men who earlier had incited the people and the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Imagine Peter and John standing there. Try to get inside of their skin and feel what they must have felt.

These were the most powerful men in the country and they hated (that is not too strong a word) Peter and John because they hated Peter's and John's master.

Why such animosity? Because the Sadducees were the collaborators with the Romans.

Their privilege of office and power rested in keeping the Roman governor happy with the way they kept peace in the country.

If this Jesus or his followers should lead a rebellion then the Romans would come down on the country like ugly on an ape, and depose the entire lot of them. The Sadducees would lose their position of power.

Not only that! Annas, the high priest emeritus, had a particular anger toward Jesus and his followers.

Annas and his family held sole possession of the vending contract at the Temple. If you wanted to sacrifice an animal or anything at the altar (and of course you were required to do so) then you had to purchase it from one of Annas' stands on the Temple grounds. You couldn't take anything into the Temple area with you.

It's like being forced to purchase everything you want at the Bronco game from someone at the stadium.

It is onto this Temple area that Jesus went and it was these vendor stands that Jesus turned over and scattered when He angrily drove the money-changers out of the Temple area.

Jesus was a threat to the greed and financial stranglehold that Annas had on the people.

When Annas and his cronies finally got rid of Jesus by convincing the Romans to kill Him, he was delighted - the threat to his scam was gone.

People have killed for less - and this was no little issue.

It is before that same angry man and his accomplices that Peter and John now stand and Peter and John are just as great a threat to Annas as Jesus was - maybe greater (because now it is not just one man but a movement)

If these men could persuade the Romans to kill Jesus, what reason would Peter and John have to think they were exempt?

What goes through the mind of a man or woman who faces death at the hand of another?

I think it was Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) who said, "Nothing else seems to focus ones thinking quite as well as a hanging."

Peter and John had spent the night in jail.

I have to believe that during these hours they thought much about what they were facing on the morrow.

As the hours wore on, they must have facilitated between fear and courage depending on which facts they focused their attention.

To get an idea of what probably happened in their minds I would like for you to find 1 Peter 1 in your Bible.

This letter written by Peter many years later gives us insight into what must have tipped the scales during those long night hours as they faced what could have been their deaths.

According to 1 Peter 1:6 Peter is writing to a group of people who were suffering.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

I don't know what your experience may be today, I don't know what pressure you may be feeling, or what temptation you are facing to just

give up BUT look at what Peter tells these people AND remember how these truths must have quieted his own mind and given him the courage to live in those dangerous hours before the court.

1 Peter 1:1-2: "To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance"

You are God's elect, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. God has chosen you of his own free choice and he set you apart for himself.

Before the creation of the world, God looked down into the ages to come and though He could see the kind of person you would be - He chose you and He set his love on you, and He caused His grace to flow to you.

Can someone who has been individually chosen by God be fearful?

Shall the elect of the Most High give way to despair?

Shall the people of the Almighty give up?

NO! Live courageously - He has chosen you.

Look at verse 3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."

God has given us "new birth into a living hope"

You are twice-born (first, at physical birth and seconds at your new birth when you trusted Christ.)

Royal blood now flows through your veins; you are descended from the King of kings.

You are born to life now. Your body will not die forever but you will be raised from the dead to live forever.

Shall such certainty of life yield to despair? NO!

Look at verse 4 “and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,

You have been born "into an inheritance that can never perish".

Imagine, if within a day or a month or a year you could be in His presence?

If that is your destiny - if that is where you are headed - then take courage - live on!

If within a short-time you will be lifted up to sit with Him, don't be overwhelmed or downcast or overcome by your troubles.

Shall the man or woman with such a future, despair? NO!

See next verse 5: “who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

"you are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation."

You are protected by the power of God.

Nothing can happen to you outside of God's permission.

Until the omnipotent god is defeated, until the unchangeable God is changed and until the immortal God dies, not one of God's chosen people shall be destroyed.

If God is so keeping me in His care - dare I be hopeless?NO!

Now again we come to verse 6 where Peter acknowledges that these people are experiencing grief, trials and confidence threatening events in their lives.

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

And what should you do about? Quit? Give up? Bail out? Never!

To the contrary:

1 Peter 1:13: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

1. Prepare your minds for action
2. Be self-controlled.
3. Set your hope fully on the grace of God to be given you when Jesus Christ comes again and
4. Be obedient.

Look at these four actions!

When the going is the toughest, when the temptation is the greatest, when, like Peter and John, the opposition is the strongest, these, by God's grace are the proper responses - these, are the responses that God will use to give us grace to have courage and press on.

Just quickly think of them with me:

"Prepare your mind for action"

This is the issue of knowing what you believe.

Take your mind back through the truths of the Christianity.

Peter and John had seen Jesus alive after the crucifixion. There could be no doubt that the one who had died was now alive. They talked with Him, they ate with Him, they spent days with Him and then saw Him ascend physically before their very eyes. Oh, it was true all right! Jesus is God – their faith is not unrealistic. It is true.

"Be self-controlled":

This is a balanced attitude.

There is a great human tendency to self-pity, to exaggerate how tough it is, how hopeless, to emotionally and extravagantly build a lopsided case for how bad it is and then wallow in the misery.

Our tendency is to not check our attitudes, to be unrealistic, to wallow in self-pity a little longer.

Instead, Peter says, discipline your attitudes - force yourself back into an honest appraisal of the situation and of the God who loves you.

Next he says, "Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed".

Attach your confidence to the grace of God.

Will you believe Him that your eternal future is safe?

Will you believe that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Will you believe that He is able to guard what you have entrusted to him until the Day of Christ's coming?

Last, he says we are to be obedient.

A simple step of obedience in the most trying time will be the means of the most strength.

Long before Peter and John got into that Courtroom on that day in Acts 4 - sometime during the night it was settled - they would believe their Lord and they would obey!

In Acts 4:7 the rulers asked them by what authority they did the miracle of the healing of the crippled man.

Peter responds: 4:8 "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit" declared the source of their actions and their confidence:

Verses 10, 11, and 12 cover much the same ground that we saw in I Peter 1.

The Crucified and Risen Christ is our confidence and our salvation (and yours for that matter) is found in no one else except Jesus.

They had prepared their minds with the truth - Jesus is alive.

They were self-controlled - not allowing their fear to cloud their judgment that God was in control.

They set their hope on God's grace - it would be worth it all to trust in Him.

And they took a step of obedience - they refused to back down but declared their allegiance to Christ.

Now look with me at Acts 4:13 which I think is the climax of the passage: "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."

No one could deny it - these men were courageous lives.

And that little phrase in the verse about "and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" is very important to me.

Their courageous lives came as a direct result of knowing who Jesus was (they prepared their minds by rehearsing the truth of Jesus), of disciplining their attitudes, of setting their hope on the grace of God to come and of obedience to their master.

How about you, do you have the courage to live? Not just exist but live?

In the midst of the most testing time of your life maybe like Peter and John you will discover the truth of I Peter 1: