

Courage for Life (and Death)

Acts 5:12-42

How did Christianity spread across the world, despite the intense opposition it faced? Where did the early Christians find the courage to keep spreading the message, and where can we find the courage to face all that life throws at us?

Heroes and Villains

Whilst it seems the characters involved are black and white, the picture is more subtle. It is clear that the apostles are the heroes: despite the threats they face, they respond with courage and joy, continuing to serve others, and tell others about Jesus.

But the response of others to the gospel falls along a spectrum, as it still does. Multitudes believed and joined the church. But others stood on the side-lines, wanting to hold things at arm's length. People still respond like that.

The authorities responded with jealousy, not willing to lose power and authority. They saw the Christian faith as a threat to the established order. In their eyes, the apostles were the villains. The authorities response should make us think: they grew ever more angry as the gospel was put to them. When we feel the gospel challenging the position of power in our lives, we too can harden ourselves to it.

Gamaliel's intervention probably saved the apostles' lives. And yet Gamaliel does not examine the truth of the gospel either. He wants to 'wait and see.' The tragedy is, he probably died 'waiting and seeing'. The gospel calls us to decide, 'what will I do with Jesus?'

Rejoicing in Adversity

There are two striking things about the apostles conduct in their trial: they don't defend themselves; and they respond to being beaten with joy. Then they go out and continue spreading the message. Where did they get that joy and courage from? And where can we find that same courage to respond to the gospel, or to share the gospel with others, or to live out the gospel, when it might cost us?

The Real Hero

Peter shows us that what inspired him and his friends was Jesus. He was the Leader, whose example they followed. Peter says the authorities had hung Jesus on a tree. That meant Jesus died cursed by God. He had died to take upon himself the curse of separation from God that we deserved, to bring us to himself, because he loved us.

When you know that is how much Jesus sacrificed for you, no cost is too great for him. When you know that is how much he loves you, you can face the insults of others, because you know whose opinion really counts; you can face the cost, and find the courage, to trust him with your life, and speak up and tell others about him; and you can give of yourself in living out the gospel in your relationships, because you are rock solid secure in his love for you.

Because ultimately, the apostles were not heroes, just normal people. Jesus was the real hero, the one to follow.