

CONVICTION AND COURAGE

A Defining Moment

The Reformation was a defining moment when the Christian convictions and courage of Reformers, such as Dr. Martin Luther, met the crossroads of decision and engaged the battle fields of belief and behaviour.

Decisive Action

Their decisive actions were blessed by God with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which made the Protestant Reformation one of the greatest movements for Faith and freedom in history.

Confronting Corruption

Dr. Martin Luther's actions were described as that of another Elijah – confronting the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Indeed, there were many similarities between the religious superstition and corruption confronted by Martin Luther in the 16th Century and the national apostasy of Israel confronted by the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 18.

A Call for Commitment

It was a defining moment when conviction and courage confronted corruption and cowardice.

“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘how long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God follow Him, but if Baal is god, follow him’. But the people answered him not a word.” 1 Kings 18:21

Against All Odds

Elijah stood alone against the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah challenged them to a contest. Those 850 false prophets were to build their altar, and Elijah would build his altar. Each would pray. The one who answered with fire, he would be recognised as the one true God.

Cowardice

“But the people answered him not a word.” Sometimes silence is golden, other times it is just plain yellow.

A Deafening Silence

The people of Israel were so backslidden and apostate that they just nailed their colours to the fence. They didn't say a word. They remained uncommitted, waiting to see how things turned out. They would surely back the winner. They are waiting to see which way the wind blew and on which altar the fire fell.

The Futility of False Religions

As there were far more prophets of Baal and Asherah, they started first. From morning until noon the false prophets called out to the name of Baal. They leapt about. There was much shouting and screaming, songs and dances, even cutting themselves with knives. They worked themselves into a frenzy, but there was no answer. No fire. After several hours of futility the false prophets had exhausted themselves.

Repairing the Altar

“Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me’. So all the people came near to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.” 1 Kings 18:30

Solid Foundations

Elijah first laid down the stones. This is symbolic of the foundational doctrines which we must all know. However, the stones were not enough.

The Wood of Faith

It is not enough to know the great truths of the Scripture, we must believe them. This is symbolised by the wood that was laid on the altar. For, to lay the wood indicated faith that the fire would fall. We must not only know the truth in our head, we must believe the truth in our hearts.

Putting Flesh to our Faith

On top of the stones and wood, Elijah placed the meat of the sacrifice. We need to put flesh to our Faith. We need to put feet to our Faith. It is not enough to know the truth in our head, and to believe the truth in our heart, we need to live the truth in our life.

Living Water

Over the sacrifice, the wood and the stones, Elijah had water poured until it saturated the sacrifice, the wood and filled the trench around the altar. This symbolises the prayer with which we should soak our lives, faith and doctrines.

The Fire of God

*“And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your Word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again’. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘**The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!**’.”* 1 Kings 18:36-39

Boldness

There is a time to stand up, a time to step out, and a time to speak up. This is what Elijah did at Mount Carmel when he confronted the false prophets of Baal. Although heavily outnumbered, and opposed by the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, Elijah had the conviction and courage to fight the good fight of Faith.

Two Foundations

There were two altars, but only one had the fire. Jesus spoke of two men who built two houses on two different foundations. But the one house was built upon the sand and when the rain fell and the winds blew and the floods rose, that house built on the sand collapsed. However, the house built upon the solid rock stood firm.

Two Ways

There are two ways, the broad way that leads to destruction, and the narrow way that leads to life. The broad way is smooth, easy, downhill and popular. The narrow way that leads to life is steep, difficult, often rough and lonely. However, we should not choose a road by how comfortable and easy it is, but by whether it is going in the right direction to get us where we need to go.

Which road are you on?

On what foundation are you building your life?

The Fruit of the Spirit

Jesus said that we would know a tree by its fruit. What is the fruit of your life? Is it the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Fruit of the Flesh

Or is it the fruit of the flesh: *“adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like; of which ... those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”* Galatians 5:19-21

Are You For Christ or Against Him?

Jesus said: *“You are either with Me, or against Me. You are either gathering, or scattering. If you confess Me before men, I will confess you before My Father, who is in Heaven, but if you deny Me before men, I will deny you before the Father and the Holy Angels.”*

Making a Stand

Despite the social pressures, the political dangers and ecclesiastical pressure Elijah stood up, stepped out and spoke out for Jehovah God. He confessed the Lord before men, and God most powerfully answered his prayer.

John Wycliffe

In the Reformation, bold believers made a similar stand for righteousness and truth. Professor John Wycliffe, of Oxford University, spoke out against the superstitions and corruptions of the Roman Catholic church. Wycliffe proclaimed that Christ alone is the Head of the Church that Scripture contains everything that is necessary for our Salvation, and all other authorities must be tested by the Scripture.

Jan Hus

Professor Jan Hus gave his life standing up for the truth of God’s Word against papal idolatry.

Savarola

Jerome Savonarola was burned at the stake in Florence for his brave attempt at Reform.

Martin Luther

Dr. Martin Luther boldly confessed his faith before the assembled might of the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. *“Unless I am convinced by Scripture, or by clear reasoning, that I am in error – for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves – I cannot recant, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; **my conscience is captive to the Word of God.** It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one’s conscience. **Here I stand.** I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.”*

Vision

The Reformation was inspired by a great vision. *“**Without a vision a people perish.**”* **What is your vision?**

Purpose

What are you living for? Reformers, like Dr. Martin Luther, were living for a vision far bigger than themselves, far bigger than their times and their nations. Their vision continues to impact and bless the world, even hundreds of years after their life.

Who Will Rise Up?

The Word of God declares: *“**Who will rise up for Me against the wicked? Who will make a stand up for Me against the workers of iniquity?**”* Psalm 94:16

David against Goliath

The young shepherd boy, David, although he was the youngest and the least, he rose up and made a stand against the blaspheming Philistine giant Goliath: *“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come to you in the Name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom you have defied.”* 1 Samuel 17:45

Christian Courage

In many ways the Reformation was a David against Goliath campaign. Courageous Reformers challenged the political and ecclesiastical authorities who had abused their powers and distorted the Scriptures. Martin Luther nailed his 95 arguments against papal indulgences to the door of the Castle Church. He burned the papal bull publically in Wittenburg. He stood firm before the emperor and refused to back down from his Scriptural position.

Nathan before the King

Nathan the prophet had the courage to confront the King: *“You are the man!”* 2 Samuel 12:7

John Knox

Scottish Reformer, John Knox, confronted the wicked Mary, Queen of Scots, in the same spirit as the prophet Nathan. John Knox described Mary, Queen of Scots, as *“a traitress and rebel against God.”* The Queen declared, trembling and in tears, that she was more afraid of the Prayers of John Knox than of an army of 10,000.

Daniel’s Steadfastness

Daniel courageously stood firm under 3 pagan kings. Exiled from his own land in childhood, Daniel is an example of steadfast integrity. He served in the governments of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazar in Babylon and under King Darius of the Medo-Persian Empire. Yet, without compromise. He refused the meat offered to idols, from the king’s table. He courageously confronted Belshazar over his blasphemous abuse of the elements, from the Temple in Jerusalem at a Babylonian banquet: *“You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting!”* Daniel 5:27. When commanded to only pray to the king, Daniel continued to faithfully pray to the Lord God Almighty. For this he was thrown into the lions’ den.

Luther and Zwingli

Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli stand out as courageous and principled Daniel’s standing firm and faithfully expounding the Scriptures amidst many threats and dangers.

John the Baptist and Jan Hus

As John the Baptist courageously preached against sin and confronted corruption and hypocrisy, even losing his own head for opposing and exposing the wickedness of King Herod, Professor Jan Hus stands out in the same spirit, and with the same courage.

Standing in the Gap

The Word of the Lord declares: *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me, on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it ...”* Ezekiel 22:30

Are you standing in the gap and interceding on behalf of the land?

Are you helping to rebuild the wall?

Are you impacting your world for Christ?

Repentance

God now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

“If My people who are called by My Name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14

Have you humbled yourself? Are you praying? Are you seeking His face? Are you turning from your wicked ways?

The Great Commission

“And Jesus came and spoke to them saying: ‘All authority has been given to Me on Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen’.” Matthew 28:18-20

What does God want you to do today? This week? This month? Next year?

Decisions

Everyday there are decisions we need to make, temptations we need to resist, Scriptural commands we need to obey. Every decision we make makes us more a creature of Heaven or hell.

Choices

Every choice we make sets us further down the broad way to destruction, or the narrow way to life. There are many defining moments which we need to respond to with courage and conviction, determination and decisiveness. However, we sometimes come across major defining moments on which far more than even our own eternal destinies depend. On such occasions we need to respond with the vision, courage, dedication and determination of the prophets and Reformers of old.

When the time comes for you to stand up, stand up boldly.

When the time comes for you to step out, step out in Faith.

When the time comes when you must speak up, speak courageously and with Christian conviction the truths of the Holy Scriptures.

“Choose for yourselves this day Whom you will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

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