

Courage In The Moment

We are continuing our teaching series on wavemakers as we talk about having courage in the moment.

Introduction

We have been teaching this series on wavemakers. These are people who have had a tremendous impact on those around them, their community, the Church, and the world. So far we have looked at Caleb and Joshua who spied out the promised land in *Righteous Perspective Among Naysayers* and *Women of Great Faith*. Today we are looking at having courage in the moment and will be looking at Stephen.

Stephen was a member of the Church after Jesus ascended to Heaven. He served others in the Church day in and day out. Most of all Stephen loved and worshipped God through Jesus. His desire to serve Jesus and be the hands and feet of Jesus outweighed everything else in his life. This desire along with his faith helped him have the courage he needed in the moment of a terrible trial which turned out to be a great witness.

Let's look at our need for courage before we read the account of Stephen in the book of Acts.

Need For Courage

Life in this world is often difficult. This is true for everyone regardless of your faith, social or economic status, or where you live. This world we live in can be dangerous. There are pitfalls all around us. Just talking to some of our cell groups around the world we hear of things like drought and famine in Kenya, floods and famine in Malawi, heatwaves and slavery in Pakistan, orphans trying to survive in Zambia, and more.

Along with all of that, a quick look at the news tells of the atrocities of war in Europe, civil unrest in America, and nations building and testing more weapons. Crime is running rampant in our cities and towns. People are not safe going to their neighborhood market, and more.

All of these things require us to have a measure of courage. When we focus on these things it is easy to be fearful. It is easy to allow worry and doubt to overtake us. We can lose sight of God's hand in this world. We can even start to doubt God's presence in this world.

We cannot face all of the things in this world without courage. Courage, provided by God through the Holy Spirit, is the only thing that will dispel fear, doubt, and worry in any situation you find yourself in. You can be in situations that may or may not be your fault, but nonetheless, you must navigate the situation and point people to Christ through it. That takes courage.

Courage is necessary to face the false accusations that are inevitable. It is also necessary to face the trials and tribulations that the devil sends your way. You can only find the necessary courage to face all of these things with grace and dignity through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus encourages all of us when he promises the Holy Spirit to us. Let's read John 14:26.



John 14:26

(26) But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus often encouraged the disciples and those following Him. He teaches us to not be afraid and to put all our trust in Him. This verse tells us that Jesus also has sent the Holy Spirit to continue to teach us, and encourage us as we face the trials and tribulations of life in this fallen world.

Let's take a look at someone who showed tremendous grace and courage in the face of death. Let's look at Stephen and the waves he made almost 2000 years ago.

Stephen Had Courage in The Moment

The book of Acts is one of my favorite books in the Bible. It shares the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through God's people and the Church grows. When the early Church was starting to grow after Jesus ascended to Heaven problems arose. One such problem was trying to keep up with the widows and orphans that were coming to faith in Jesus, but needed help surviving. The Apostles were spending so much time serving the widows that not much else was happening. Some were even not being served because there were so many.

Let's read the solution in Acts 6:1-7.

Acts 6:1-7

(1) In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. (2) So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. (3) Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them (4) and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." (5) This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. (6) They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (7) So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Focus on what the scripture says about Stephen. The leaders were looking for men filled with the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom. One of these men was Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. That is an impressive introduction. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and faith. This is important because Stephen is about to become a wavemaker.

Stephen took his ministry very seriously. We can determine that God was with Stephen in all he said and did by reading Acts 6:8.

Acts 6:8

(8) Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.



Stephen sounds like he was doing great things for God in the name of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit empowered him to do many things and this was obviously making waves in the community. The Jews did not like what they were hearing and seeing. They felt threatened and started to cause trouble for Stephen. Let's read what happens next in Acts 6:9-15.

Acts 6:9-15

(9) Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. (10) But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. (11) Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." (12) So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. (13) They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. (14) For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." (15) All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

The courage that comes through the Holy Spirit allowed Stephen to confidently go and stand before the religious leaders of the Jews. This is very similar to Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate in which he was ordered to be crucified. False witnesses, lies, rumors, and half-truths are all used to manipulate people and keep God's work from progressing.

Stephen, having the courage given to him by the Holy Spirit, then answered the charges made about him by sharing the history of Israel. He preached about God's hand on Israel and all He had done for them through the ages. He faced them with grace and power speaking as the Holy Spirit gave him words. Stephen then pointed out their sin and disobedience of God. This took great courage; courage that can only be provided by the Holy Spirit.

The religious leaders were furious and dragged Stephen out to be stoned. Let's read the last part of this story found in Acts 7:55-60.

Acts 7:55-60

(55) But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (56) "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (57) At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, (58) dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (59) While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (60) Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He showed the same grace and forgiveness in the face of death that Jesus showed on the cross. This makes Stephen a wavemaker. This same courage, grace, and forgiveness can be yours when you face moments like this.



You Can Have Courage in The Moment

Stephen is pointed out and recorded in Scripture, but that is not what makes him a wavemaker. He allowed the Holy Spirit to equip him, guide him, and use him, to serve others. He was open to the Holy Spirit to give him the words he needed to point out sin. Stephen then had the courage to face whatever consequences came from it.

You too can have this same courage. It may seem strange to some of you that you could face certain death because of your faith, but it happens throughout the world every day. This same courage is also necessary to face other persecutions. You need the courage of the Holy Spirit to acknowledge when you are wrong and make things right.

There are many different kinds of moments in which you need courage. The Holy Spirit is the one and only source of the courage you need to face every moment of every day. There are difficulties you will face. There will be false accusations, threats against your safety, and uncertain and dangerous situations you will find yourself in. You must allow the Holy Spirit to be with you.

The Holy Spirit not only equips you with power, wisdom, and grace. He also brings you comfort and understanding. You can have all you need to face any situation you find yourself in. The key is to keep your focus on Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to give you the courage and strength necessary to face the moment you are in.

Ask the Lord in your daily prayer time to give you all you need to face that day. Trust that He will direct your paths and will deliver you from the fiery darts of the evil one. God's plan is not to destroy you, or anyone else for that matter. God desires all people to be reconciled back to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and Faith. He trusted the Lord and believed everything he had learned from Jesus and allowed the Holy Spirit to work in and through him. This makes Stephen a wavemaker.

Are you a wavemaker? Do you want to be? Do you want to make a lasting impact in this world? Look at Stephen. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through you as Stephen did. Trust the Lord's teachings above all. Look at people as the Lord looks at them.

When you are facing difficult situations, trust the Holy Spirit will provide all you need to successfully make it through. The Holy Spirit will provide you with all the grace, forgiveness, strength, and courage for the moment that you need.

Having courage in the moment will make you a wavemaker.

