

“UNDAUNTED WITNESS”
Daniel 1:8-21, Colossians 4:10-15, Acts 17:1-15
January 15 & 16, 2025

Dr. James Langteau sent me this email last week. It is titled, “Are you opposed and criticized? Consider this example.” It goes on to tell the account of Joshua Chamberlain. “Joshua was a school teacher and seminary graduate who was ridiculed when he volunteered to serve in the Civil War.

“The Attorney General of Maine wrote on July 21, 1862, to the Governor of Maine, ‘Have you appointed Chamberlain Colonel of the 20th? His old classmates here say you have been deceived; that Chamberlain is nothing at all; that is the universal expression of those who know him.’ Obviously many stood in opposition to his position, questioning his abilities to lead.

“But History proves otherwise. Against overwhelming odds, Chamberlain and his outnumbered troops defended Little Round Top during five waves of assault which led to the Union victory at Gettysburg. This denied the Confederacy a victory in the three-day battle and also blocked a clear attack on Washington D.C.

“Chamberlain was arguably the single-most significant individual in avoiding defeat both at Gettysburg and ultimately national defeat during the Civil War. If Chamberlain had not been determined in the face of personal and vicious opposition, he might not have served at all, thereby limiting the Union’s ability to win the war.

“General Grant later honored Chamberlain by having him receive the weapons and the colors of the Confederacy when General Lee surrendered at the end of the war. Though some loathed him and predicted his failure as a soldier, history reveals an entirely different story. After receiving honor for his heroic military service, he went on to serve multiple terms as Governor of Maine.”

I find it interesting that though many saw Joshua Chamberlain as a disappointment, and one who could never do well in leadership, he faced that opposition and criticism with boldness, courage and tenacity to become a remembered hero who had an important part of establishing the United States as we know it today. His Christian faith led him beyond opposition and criticism so that he could live as an outstanding witness for the Lord. And God blessed him.

Each one of us is also encouraged to let our Christian faith guide our lives so that we might be the best witnesses for Jesus that we can be. Throughout our lives, we will certainly have those who oppose us, and criticize what we do for whatever reasons. But as we hold strong in our faith in Jesus, He will lift us up and fortify our lives with His grace and His strength so that we might also endure and persevere to live boldly for Him.

We see this in the life of Daniel, too. In our Old Testament lesson today, he “*resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine*” (Daniel 1:8) of the King of Babylon, but asked the chief official that had been appointed over himself, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, to give them vegetables and water for ten days as a test to see what they would look like afterwards. After those ten days, the chief official could then judge for himself to see if they were better off or worse than the others who were eating of the King’s table.

As it turned out, “*they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food*” (Daniel 1:15), and God continued to bless them for their diligence and endurance in faithfulness. As they stood strong in their faith, these four young men from Judah were selected to become leaders within the Babylonian Empire. And they helped King Nebuchadnezzar find faith in God because of their strong, bold witness. They had to face lions and fiery furnaces, mind you, as they remained committed to the Lord God Almighty. But through it all, they were delivered in miraculous ways, as testimony to the King, that the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the people of Israel, was the real God of all. It was He who is worthy of praise and honor and glory, and Him only.

And it was because of their faith that God had blessed them with success in all that they did. And that got the attention and the anger from the other leaders. Because they lived bold witnesses for the Lord God Almighty, they were opposed and criticized and plotted against. Yet, as they continued to serve the Lord and the King faithfully, God used them as living testimonies to the value of having faith in the Lord our God.

Living faithful lives for the Lord is not always an easy thing to do. Faith in Jesus Christ is often ridiculed, belittled and even attacked by those who live according to the world's ways. Since those living of the world do not know the value of having Jesus Christ as our Savior, they do their best to demean anything put forth by those who do have faith in Jesus. It's happened throughout history, and it continues even to today.

So it can be scary at times to live as a witness for Jesus. However, we are called to trust in Jesus for our every need, and guidance for our every decision. And when we face opposition, we are invited to hold on to Jesus and let Him see you through. It may not be easy for you, but it will amaze you as to how others respond.

Take Boris for example. In the 1970's, Boris was arrested for being an ambassador for Christ. "On purpose - to humiliate him for his faith in Christ - the prison guards had issued him a uniform that was twice his size. The sleeves reached his knees; his gigantic shoes made him look like a clown. When he entered the barracks, the criminals, incited by the camp commander, greeted him with laughter and ridicule.

"Finally the inmates' mocking laughter stopped. Boris didn't smile.

"A prisoner came and bowed in front of him with fake piety. 'I greet you, Holy Father.

You are the Ambassador of Christ Himself. Do you represent the interests of heaven?’

“His mocking words gave Boris courage. He forgot how ridiculous he looked and boldly answered, ‘Yes, I do represent heaven. That is why the atheists hate me and have imprisoned me.’

“Boris recalled, ‘While I was preaching to those despising sinners, the sermon affected me too. Soon, I wanted to hug them for having reminded me of my high calling! Many fear suffering; in the past, I too feared. But the presence of the Lord in jail has given me so many happy experiences that I would not have changed them for years of easy living in freedom.’

“The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “*We are Christ’s ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ Himself were here pleading with you, ‘Be reconciled to God!’”¹*

You see, Paul learned to take advantage of every opportunity to speak out for Jesus, too. Having left Philippi, after being imprisoned for setting a slave girl free from demonic possession, Paul and his companions continued west in their travels, arriving at Thessalonica. Listen to what took place there. This is Acts 17:1-15. (READ Acts 17:1-15)

Almost everywhere he went, Paul took the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to the Jews first. They were his own people, so he wanted them to hear the great Good News of God’s Salvation first so that they could become the messengers for Christ with him to their own communities. For three weeks, Paul “*reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,’ he said*” (17:2-3).

Now, this was not “Paul’s gospel.” It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was Paul telling

¹ (DC Talk and Voice of the Martyrs, *Jesus Freaks*, [Tulsa, OK: Albury Publishing, 1999] pg. 241-242)

the Good News of the fulfillment of all of God's promises in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, that God would make a way for us to find Salvation from our sins. God's Messiah had been prophesied and then finally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was God's ambassador for Jesus Christ to all the people he went to. Paul was highlighting and illuminating the teachings that had been passed down from generation to generation throughout Judaism. It was mysterious to the other cultures because they did not know the prophecies that had been given to the Jews.

In Thessalonica, Paul was trying to help the Jews understand that God had given them His Messiah. He used passage after passage of Scripture to put the dots together for the people to see how God had brought forth the Son of God on earth as a human. Jesus lived a perfect life among the people as witness to His being the Son of God. He taught the ways of God, bringing the full intention of the Laws of God into focus so that the people could see how God invites them to live by those Laws. Then, He was willing to become arrested, tortured, crucified and killed as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. And finally, after three days in death, having reached out to the lost souls in hell, He rose from the dead, defeated sin and death finally, once and for all. And He gave His followers the authority, that only He has, to go out into the world and tell everyone about Him so that we all can find salvation from our sins as we put our faith and trust in Him. Jesus did all these things, and that is why we give Him the title Christ! He is God with us, calling each one of us to follow Him.

So as Paul presented this Good News about Jesus Christ, some of the Jews and many of the God-fearing Greeks came to faith in Jesus. The dots were connected that lined up God's provision of a Messiah, Jesus, and the faithful believed and rejoiced in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

However, because of the success of Paul's instruction to the people, this caused jealousy

among some other Jews, who then began to raise up opposition to the truth of the Gospel. It is curious that they “*rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd*” (17:5). Satan had learned how to cause uprisings in other communities, so he used it wherever Paul’s company went to keep all of the people from being convinced of Jesus Christ being the Lord of all. “*But when they did not find [Paul or Silas], they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials*” (17:6).

Instead of welcoming Jesus as the Messiah to be the King of kings and Lord of lords, these Jews go to the city officials with the words, “*These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus*” (17:6-7). Had they so quickly given up on their own tradition that promised a Messiah to come to free Israel? Had they now become converted to following the laws and traditions of Caesar?

Nonetheless, Jason and the other believers stood their ground, stood firm in their faith, and then continued to witness to those around them of the love of God in Jesus Christ. That community of faith grew to the point that Paul wrote two letters of encouragement to them so that they could remain faithful.

So Paul and Silas went by night to Berea, several miles west of Thessalonica. Again they went to the synagogue to share the Good News of Jesus with them. The reception there was better because instead of rejecting what Paul and Silas were saying about Jesus, the people “*received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many...*” people believed (17:11-12). They searched the Scriptures and found that what Paul and Silas were saying was true and they received Jesus

Christ as their Savior. They believed Paul's testimony of Jesus being God's Son sent to the world for the forgiveness of sins, and their lives were forever changed from darkness to light.

Paul's undaunted witness of faith in Jesus Christ transformed the lives of many a Jew. His preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ gathered many Gentiles to faith also, because Jesus provides the hope and life that so many longed for.

When we're faced with the difficulties and struggles of this world, and we find ourselves needing more than what this world can give to us, we begin looking beyond ourselves and we find God's provision in Jesus Christ. But there has to be someone who will live their life as a testimony of faith in Jesus so that the people around them can see it and come to know Jesus through their witness. The Church of Jesus Christ needs to find their position as ambassadors of Jesus so that everyone has the chance to hear about Jesus and receive Him as their Savior.

So many people in our world today are floundering, day by day longing for some kind of hope that they can stake their life upon. They are looking for some promise that they can cling to so that they can face their own difficulties and struggles and trials here in this world. We have the answer - It is Jesus Christ! So why won't we live our faith boldly before others so that they might find the hope and the promise that they are looking for?

Faith in Jesus Christ is not meant to be kept a secret, folks. When the world is hungry for spiritual food, we are to be the ones to tell them where the source of spiritual nourishment is found - in Jesus. We are invited, even commanded, to be the witnesses for our world of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. How else are they going to find faith in Jesus unless we share Him with them?

In our world today, as many are seeking to vilify and badmouth the teachings and beliefs of Christianity, we need to be the ones who boldly live our faith in front of others so that they

can really see the difference that Jesus makes. Even if it means arrest, harsh treatment, or even imprisonment, Jesus calls us to live as undaunted witnesses before the people that they want the faith that we have, and then we can share Jesus with them.

Who is it in your life that you can give hope and life and love to so that their lives are changed? Who can you pour yourself into so that they might be able to overcome the hardships and trials that they face?

I am encouraged by the work that the men of Ephesians 5 is making in the lives of other men all over the city. As they have found the grace and love of Jesus Christ in their own lives, as they are beginning to overcome some of the things in their lives, they are not keeping their faith quiet, but are stepping up to share the hope they have found with others who are struggling as they once were. They are becoming disciples of Jesus Christ who are then making disciples, and they are sharing the hope and grace and love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ with many more.

I would encourage each of you to do the same thing. If you claim Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, don't be shy with your faith. Find another person you can help so that they might also enjoy the love and joy of Jesus, too. Be undaunted witnesses of the love of Jesus in our community, and He will guide and direct and bless your way.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for Jesus' great love for us! Thank You for granting each of us the grace we need to accept and claim Jesus as our Savior. May we be like Paul and Silas, like Aristarchus and Mark and Barnabas and Justus, living our faith every day, diligently seeking the opportunity to help another person come to faith in Jesus Christ. May we follow Epaphras' example, "*wrestling in prayer for [others] that [they] may stand firm in all the will of God*" (Col. 4:12). May we all be undaunted witnesses for Jesus, for it is in Jesus' Name we pray. AMEN.