

## Be Strong in Christ

### (Act 4: 13-20) David Xu

This story happened after Peter and John healed a man who had been a lame since he was born. He asked Peter and John for money at the gate of the Temple. Peter didn't give him any money, but something much much better. "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Act 3:6) So this man crippled all his life, all of sudden had strength in his legs and ankles and started to walk and jump.

This miracle certainly shocked the people around. Peter and John took this opportunity starting to preach the good news of Jesus. The Sadducees felt very uncomfortable about their teaching of Jesus resurrection, because they were the very persons who sent Jesus to cross. So they arrested Peter and John. What could happen to them? Could they be persecuted and crucified, like Jesus? What did Peter and John do in face of this persecution? When people are facing danger, we normally will keep low profile, looking for ways of escape, but in this story, we find Peter and John didn't hide from danger, on the contrary, they ran towards danger even it might cost their lives.

Today let's study how Peter and John dealt with the imminent danger, how they reacted when they were threatened and pressured for preaching Christ Jesus.

#### Human flesh is weak

Well we know, Peter and John were not always very brave. All four Gospels recorded how Peter denied Jesus 3 times, how all disciples were scared and hid away from public after Jesus was arrested. This was not a good record, certainly not things you want to write on your CV. Yet the Bible faithfully recorded them all. As a matter of fact, in all four Gospels, there are many stories of disciples' failure. They argued who was to be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24), in Mark 14, just before Jesus was arrested. 3 times Jesus told them to be alert and pray, and 3 times they fell asleep. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."(Mark 14:37-38).

Elvis Presley was called the 'King' of Rock N Roll.

Elvis' childhood friend, Becky Martin, said that Elvis always wanted to be a preacher. She said that in the 70s Elvis told her, "Becky, just think what I could have done if I had become a preacher! Just think of the good I could have done for the Lord!"

'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'. Elvis struggled. He loved doing Gospel music, but he struggled his whole life to connect the two worlds without success.

Just think what Elvis could have done if he had become a preacher. **BROTHERS** and sisters, we all have our weakness, we all have regrets for things we should have done. The good news is that we still have a chance - like Peter, John and other disciples, we can still join team Jesus and follow him to victory; by the help of his spirit, we can be strong and fearless.

## Be strong in the Spirit

“13When 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.”

The religious leaders knew Jesus, how could they forget? they had him crucified not very long ago. They also knew Peter and John were Jesus’ closest disciples. They must be very confused, haven’t we just killed Jesus? Didn’t you all scattered and hid away? They thought the threat of Jesus was over. Were they not afraid of being killed like their teacher Jesus? Peter and John were fisherman, truly as described, they were unschooled, ordinary men. So what made these ordinary men extraordinary?

Peter and other disciples made a U turn after Jesus’ resurrection. Before, they were terrified, they lost direction, they worried what could happen to them, they didn’t know what to do. But now, they had their focus back on Jesus again, they were given a new mission that is to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28). Then Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem, because they would be equipped and baptized by Holy Spirit.

Act 2, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Act 2: 1-4)

When Holy Spirit dwelled in them, it fanned the fire in them to speak out their witness of Jesus, to testify for Jesus. From a group of uneducated ordinary and coward man, they became Jesus’ elite force. They became great preachers, in Jerusalem 3,000 man were baptized on that day. They were busy going out preaching Jesus, in Jerusalem, outside Jerusalem, they went to all the Mediterranean area. Nothing can stop them. Today, Jesus team is still busy preaching the good news around the world.

**Gladys May Aylward** was a British missionary to China. She was born to a working-class family. She worked as a housemaid from her early teens, a very ordinary CV, but later she felt a calling to go overseas as a Christian missionary. When she committed herself to Jesus, she started an extraordinary journey.

In 1932, she spent her life savings on a train passage to [Yangcheng, Shanxi Province](#), China. The perilous trip took her across [Siberia](#) with the [Trans-Siberian Railway](#). She was detained by the Russians, she fled away with local help and took a lift from a Japanese ship. She traveled across Japan with the help of the British Consul and took another ship to China.

In YangCheng, Aylward worked with an Jeannie Lawson. The two founded *The Inn of the Eight Happinesses* (八福客栈). She and Mrs. Lawson used this opportunity sharing stories about a man named [Jesus](#).

In 1938, the region was invaded by Japanese forces, a reward of \$100 was offered to informant who could bring Aylward to captive. Aylward led over 100 orphans to safety over the mountains, for 12 days they were climbing mountains that seldom traveled before.

She never married, but spent her entire life devoting herself to Christian work in China. She was greatly respected among the people, taking in orphans, intervening in a volatile prison riot and advocating prison reform, risking her life many times to help those in need. The mayor of Yangcheng made a speech before they evacuated the city, he said "Ai-weh-deh, my dear friend, Ai-weh-deh, I have seen all that you are and all that you do, and I would like to be a Christian like you."

An ordinary person's life became most extraordinary because she devoted her life to Jesus.

### **Witness for Jesus the Christ.**

14But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. 15So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. 17But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

Eye witness is powerful. No one can deny a fact with so many eye witness. Even your enemy can't do so. Our personal testimony is for God's glory. That is why sharing our personal testimony is so important when spreading Gospel.

Well the religious leaders didn't know what to do with Peter and John. They couldn't put them to jail, because they just did a miracle and many people witnessed it. If they just let them go like nothing happened, they would lose their faces in front of the public. So all they could do was to warn them not to talk about Jesus anymore. "19But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

"which is right in God's eyes, listen to you or to him (God)"? Well it is easy for us sitting here to say "we only listen to God", because we don't have to face persecution, there is no life threatening to us. But put us into Peter and John's position, they were facing the same group of people who put Jesus on cross not long before. They could have Peter and John executed as well.

Being a witness for Jesus can be very risky. Every month 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 Churches and Christian properties are destroyed, 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians (such as beating, abductions, rapes, arrests and forced marriages). According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions (and many of these people are Christians). Also, according to the United States Department of State, Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

Now you know the fact, do you still want to be a Christian? At very beginning of his ministry, Jesus told us there will be persecution to his followers. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5 11-12)

Desmond Doss was a US Army medic in WWII. In the battle of Okinawa, he saved 75 wounded soldiers single handed under enemy fire, while all his company retreated. He was awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest decoration you can get in US military. President Truman personally put the medal on his chest. But he was regarded as a coward in the training camp, because he refused to touch rifle to kill anyone due to his Christian faith. He was mocked by his sergeant, blind beaten by his roommates while he was asleep, he was given direct order from his commander to touch a rifle, or he would be court-martialed, but he still refused to give in. In the battlefield, he showed those who called him coward what is true courage, what is true comradeship, what is true love. He kept praying to God, let him save one more, let him save one more. He ended up saved total 75 wounded soldiers. He didn't just saved his comrade but also Japanese soldiers. And remember his, he didn't carry any weapon to protect him, all he had was his faith in God.

That is why Paul in 2 Timothy said "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ... Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2: 1&3).

Hebrew 10:35-36 encouraged us "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."

As children of Almighty God, we should be true warriors in Christ. Paul said: "7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (2 timothy 1:7)

Dear brothers and sisters, by his spirit we can all be strong and brave, like Aylward and Desmond.