

### **Tips for Preaching to an Angry Mob**

Because of her faith in Jesus Christ, Ruby Bridges was a brave little girl on that day in 1960. Have you ever had a time in your life when you knew that what was right to do would not be accepted by other people? How did you resolve that situation? Did you do what was right anyway? Did you say what needed to be said?

In our Scripture lesson today, the apostle Paul stood before an angry mob and spoke the truth. Before we come to this table, a table that represents the day that Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price of His life for speaking the truth to people who vehemently disagreed, we need to allow God to teach us what it takes and why it is important to speak the truth, even to angry mobs. First, we need to see that...

#### **I. Life Shrinks or Expands in Proportion to One's Courage <sup>i</sup>.**

Paul knew that his going to Jerusalem would end up in a confrontation. He knew it just like Jesus knew His going to Jerusalem would end in His own death. So, why did they both go? As we saw last week, Paul was warned of the danger. Why did he go?

In our Men's Fraternity morning group, Frat@Dawn, we've been tremendously challenged by a video series and book by Dennis Rainey. It's called, *Stepping Up* and the subtitle is: *A Call to Courageous Manhood*. We've heard and studied many definitions of courage but the one that sticks with me is one that Dennis Rainey uses in his book. It goes like this:

*Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important.* <sup>ii</sup>

What was it that Paul thought was "more important" than his fear? He thought that doing the will of God was more important than his fear. I've quoted Acts 20:24 several times in this series because it is the quintessential statement by Paul of his values. He says:

**...I consider my life worth nothing to me (life is not his highest value), if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me (his highest value is doing the will of God, specifically for Paul, its...) -the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:24)**

As you sit here today, what do you fear most? Everybody's afraid of something so, what's your greatest fear? Losing your job? Losing your health? Getting divorced? Being alone? What do you fear most? Paul had good reason on multiple occasions to fear losing his life. But he kept putting himself into situations where that possibility was present. Why did he do that? Was he NOT afraid? No, he tells us in II Corinthians that the whole time in was in Asia that he "...despaired even of life" (II Cor. 1:8). No, Paul felt fear just like we do, but it didn't stop him from crossing the border into the situation where his greatest fear lived. Why? Because for Paul, courage was not the absence of fear, but the judgment that something else was more important – doing the will of God.

In the place where your fear lives, what is the will of God? (repeat) Well, how do we know what the will of God is in ANY situation? WE SEARCH HIS WORD!!!

Search God's Word for God's promises that are related to your fear. You could do this with a concordance (the index at the back of many Bibles) or on the Internet. For example, I looked up "Bible quotes, loneliness" on the web. Two great verses came up:

**Matt. 28:20 And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**

**Ps. 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...**

So, from just those two verses, what do we know is the will of God regarding loneliness? First, God is with us and secondly, we don't need to run from the fear. God will see us through even the worst of lonely situations.

But this all begins where? It begins with us deciding that God's will is our highest value. If we say "peace" is our highest value, then forget it. You'll never defeat your fear. Fear will rule you. Your life will shrink smaller and smaller. Which reminds me of my secretary, Pat, at the church I served in Minnesota. She had an aging father who was becoming more and more fearful as the years went by. He was particularly afraid of illness caused by food. So, he kept a list on his refrigerator of all the foods that were safe to eat. But when he'd read an article in the paper or hear a report on the news of some food that was dangerous, he'd cross that food off his list. My secretary told me one day, he was down to only 9 foods he would eat!

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to our courage. Don't be ruled by fear. Put your trust in God! **Tip #1 for speaking to an angry mob is this: speak God's Word to fear.** Secondly we need to see in this passage that...

## **II. Truth Is Carried Best in a Story.**

So, Paul is once again being attacked, falsely accused and physically beaten. **Verse 31** says:

**While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.**

So, the commander sends out a squad to arrest Paul and bring him back to the barracks. But Paul asks the commander:

**Please let me speak to the people. (Acts 21:39)**

Now, if this were you, would you have made that request? You are being beaten by a mob and rather than asking the commander to get you out of there as fast as possible, Paul asks to speak to the men who were trying to kill him. Right there, right there you've got to say to yourself, "There's something different about this guy. This guy has something going on inside him that I do not understand."

And then, he launches into his story. This is the second time in this book that we hear the story of how Paul became a follower of Jesus Christ. He'll tell it one more time in a courtroom before the end of Acts. But this is obviously the most dramatic setting which demonstrates, I believe, that Paul was determined to have these people hear his story. So, in just 2 ½ minutes, Paul explains how he went from being a disciple slayer to a disciple maker. In Acts 26 where he does this again in the courtroom of king Agrippa, he does it in an equally short period of time, about 3 ½ minutes. Could you do that today? A 2 ½ to 3 ½ minute story is about two thirds of a page, single spaced, 12pt type. Could you do that?

I'm giving you a homework assignment right now to do that. Write out your story of how you became a follower of Jesus Christ in less than one page, single spaced, 12pt type. I can hear it now, you're saying inside, "How am I supposed to do that? I wouldn't know

where to start?" Okay, I'll give you the outline. Actually, Paul's version of his story in Acts 26 is a great outline for us, so let's use that. His outline there looks like this:

1. My Life before I became a Christian (or when I was a "child" Christian)
  - a. How I thought
  - b. How I lived
2. How I Surrendered My Life to Jesus
  - a. Tell the story
  - b. Share details of what you said and did
3. How My Life Changed Once I Received His Forgiveness
  - a. Here's what's different in my life now
  - b. "...I have had God's help to this very day..." Paul-Acts 26:22
4. "Would You Like to Receive God's Forgiveness as I did?"

So, listen. I'm not speaking rhetorically. I actually want you to go home and do this, this week. The goal is to get this all written on less than one sheet of paper (or one screen on your computer). Then there's one more step... practice saying it to another Christian. Yes, you can read it if you must, but just try it. Take it out for a test drive! Mess with it, edit it, play with it (don't make up stuff! I'm just saying, try saying it a different way - Paul did!) Then, "test drive it" again.

Do you see where I'm going with this? I'm equipping you. I'm preparing you to follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul who was following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who crossed the ultimate border when He came from Heaven to earth. I'm equipping you to be ready to enjoy the greatest experience any human being can ever have - to obey the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' last words on earth were a promise to His followers. He said:

**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)**

When you get your story down to one page and you combine it with the Roman Road Bible verses I gave you a few weeks ago, (Remember the Roman Road?) then you're all set to be a "complete witness" for Jesus Christ. Now all you need is an angry mob to tell your story! Aren't you excited??!!

But seriously, I do believe this: when you have your story ready to tell, God will give you opportunities to tell it. You won't have to manufacture opportunities. God will put you in a conversation with someone where you will find it perfectly natural to say, "Could I tell you about something that happened to me that changed my life?" And when they say yes, the fun begins!

So, tip #2 for speaking to an angry mob is this: tell your story of grace. And the last tip from Paul on angry mob preaching is this...

### **III. Expect Good to Be the Result.**

If Paul were still just a Jewish lawyer and evaluated his situation in Jerusalem based only on circumstantial evidence, he would have had to come to the conclusion that his goose was cooked. The Jewish religious authorities wanted him dead. Paul was their worst nightmare - an insider who'd gone rogue. They didn't just want him dead, they NEEDED him dead. And Paul knew they had the power to do it. Look at what they did with Jesus, a man found innocent by the Roman courts whom the Jewish authorities manipulated into a public death sentence. Paul was actually as big, if not a bigger, threat than Jesus. Do you see why all of Paul's friends were begging him NOT to go to Jerusalem?

But Paul had another agenda. We see it in Romans 9. Listen to his heart but remember that it was the Jewish hierarchy that was trying to kill him. Listen:

**I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.** (Rom. 9:1-4a)

Paul's anguish wasn't for himself and his own circumstances. No, he was in anguish over the fact that "the mob" was lost! Paul is worried about the mob!! How could Paul have such a tender heart, such love for those who wanted him dead?

Have you ever had someone who was out to destroy you? Is there someone right now who is trying to do that? What do you feel in your heart toward that person? If there is someone "out to get you," then you're probably asking, "How could Paul actually love them? How could he wish the best for them?"

It all has to do with Paul's own story. Remember the details of how Stephen died? What was the last thing Stephen did? He gave witness to Jesus Christ as the Righteous One from God before an angry mob in the Sanhedrin. He told his story of faith in Jesus Christ. And he died as a result of doing that. At that moment, the natural thing would have been for Stephen to think, "What's the use of testifying for Jesus right here, right now? These guys are going to kill me! What good could possibly come from me telling my story of receiving the grace of Jesus now?"

But buried in that angry mob was one important set of ears. Saul, the junior prosecuting attorney, was listening. He was watching. He heard Stephen's last words:

**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.** (Acts 7:60)

As far as we know, on the day Stephen died, no one in that angry mob became a Christian. But on that day, Stephen's story was used by the Holy Spirit to prepare Saul's heart for another day when he would bow his knee before the King of Kings. And through the ministry and writings of Saul, who heard Stephen's story that day, hundreds of millions of people would one day receive the grace of God through Christ.

Once you write out your story, will you be willing to tell your story as God gives you opportunity? Now, it's true, you may tell it a hundred times and never see for yourself that someone asks for and receives the forgiveness of God. But trust God! Every time you tell it, something good will be the result, because God said:

**As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
And do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish...**

**So is my word... It will not return to me empty...** (Is. 55:10-11)

Go, write out your story and then get ready for the greatest experience on earth. As you tell it to someone, you will enter the perfect will of God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Dennis Rainey, *Stepping Up* (Little Rock: Family Life Publishing, 2011), p. 21

<sup>ii</sup> Dennis Rainey, *Stepping Up* (Little Rock: Family Life Publishing, 2011), p. 3