

## *Are You Strong Enough To Stand?*

By Steve & Carol Ryerson

A woman is arrested for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Put in prison, she talks to the other women in her cell about her Jesus and how wonderful He is. As those ladies come to Jesus and are transformed by Him, the prison officials put this woman in isolation and hold basic food and water for her to a very minimum. Not to be deterred, this woman, with swollen tongue from dehydration, puts her head to the bars, and with all of the breath she can muster, she yells out the good news of Jesus Christ to anyone who can hear. Scores of women throughout the cell block experience Jesus for themselves because of this woman who is determined. The prison officials have a real problem on their hands. They had arrested her to stop her, but she is converting as many people to her Jesus in prison as she had when she was free.

This may seem far-fetched, but it is a true story that took place within our lifetime in a repressive, Communist country.

Contrast that with Christianity in the United States of America. We have freedom of religion here, but more and more often we are hearing reports of Christians being arrested for various “offenses.” This is also happening in other “free” countries, and we are rightfully concerned. However, we must keep this in perspective.

A number of years ago the head of a well-known Christian ministry was involved in a political battle regarding some issue of religious freedom. He made the comment that he was fighting for the survival of the church in America. We agree that our freedom in America is a tremendous blessing from God, and we want to continue to live in that liberty as long as possible. But it is rather presumptuous to say that the survival of the Church of Jesus Christ depends upon any one of us.

Let’s take a look at the early church in the book of Acts.

*Acts 2:42-47 ~ And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

God’s people were living together in community ~ sharing what they had, worshipping together, telling those around them about Jesus and seeing Jesus perform miracles through the apostles. It must have been a glorious time!

That did not continue for long, as Peter and John were soon put in prison overnight for teaching people the resurrection from the dead through Jesus. (Acts 4:1-3). What was their response to this?

*Acts 4:19-20 ~ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

Many today might say, “Well, I guess we’ll just have to be quiet about our faith,” or “Oh, no! We aren’t allowed to be Christians anymore!” But not Peter and John! They declared up front to their captors that they would continue doing the LORD’s work. When they were released, Peter and John promptly went back to their people and reported what had happened, which resulted in a prayer meeting.

*Acts 4:29-33 ~ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*

Notice that the prayer of this young church was not for the persecution to be removed. Rather, their prayer was that God would give them boldness to keep speaking and that He would continue to do miracles through them to confirm His Word. Remember that Jesus had told them signs would follow those who believe (Mark 16:17-18,20).

Sometimes we look at people in the book of Acts and think that they were super spiritual, super humans who could do things we could not possibly be expected to do ~ so different from normal people today. We beg to differ with that view. Those early Christians were people just like you and me. They did have fear and there were times when they wanted to cower and take the easy path of keeping silent. That is why they had to pray for boldness. God is always faithful to answer the prayers of believers who pray according to His will.

In Acts 5 a couple in the church felt they could lie to God and get away with it (after all, who would know?). Immediately after bringing the lie to the attention of the apostles, God slew them. This event multiplied the Church:

*Acts 5:11-16 ~ And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.). Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

After a while, God led the apostles to have the church appoint deacons (who needed to be men of faith and full of the Holy Ghost, not carnal men) to take care of the everyday needs of the church. This brought more people into the Church:

*Acts 6:7-8 ~ And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

Throughout these chapters we see a victorious Church. Yes, there were problems and some brief imprisonments, but the Church lived in victory. They were out in Solomon's porch, an area by the temple which was a place of commerce, a meeting place for people, and a place where foreigners passing through Jerusalem would have stopped. They were out among the people, sharing the Good News, and God was there with them doing the work. As a result, people were being transformed.

By Acts chapter 8 circumstances have changed. Stephen has just been martyred and a zealous young Pharisee named Saul is coming into prominence.

*Acts 8:1, 3-4 ~ And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles....As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

Things are getting pretty serious here. This is a situation that few of us can truly comprehend. The terror is just like what people in Communist countries experience today ~ meeting in secret and wondering when they will be raided and arrested. What was the response of God's people? They preached the word everywhere they went so that more and more souls in far-reaching areas were brought into God's Church.

These were people who had a deep faith in God. They believed. They knew that God would do what He had promised and they acted on it.

Now think about yourself and your family. The climate is changing i.e., the cultural climate and the world's view of Christians. People today are more likely to be critical of those claiming to be Christians than they were in past years. Of course, we need to work to keep our freedoms as long as possible. But, what will you do if/when you are put in jail for your faith in God?

Some of us were home schooling before it was legal in our respective states. We know what it is to hear a knock on the door and wonder if it is a delivery man or a policeman ready to arrest us for teaching our children. We

personally had to make some decisions because we knew this could happen. We had to determine that we were in God's will and trust that He would be faithful to us if that dreaded knock did come. Thank God that it didn't, but you don't know the future when you are living in the present.

Back to the question with which we started: Are you strong enough to stand? Are you training your children to be strong enough to stand? What would you do if you were arrested and put in jail for your faith?

A number of years ago we heard a Christian radio announcer who, in the midst of his station's annual fund raiser, said, "How would you make it from Sunday to Sunday without this station?"

We have heard preachers comment that people need to be in every service so that they can get strength to make it through the days until the next service.

In the Bible we do see the Church living in community, but we also see that under adverse circumstances, they stood. Our walk with God must be strong enough that we don't need constant preaching and music from a radio station to be faithful to God. We shouldn't be coming together with God's people so spiritually dry ourselves that we need to soak up everything just to make it through the intervening days until the next time we meet.

Rather, Scripture tells us that when we assemble together it should be for the purpose of edifying, exhorting, and encouraging each other. We need to have heard from God at home so that we can go with a word, a testimony, a prophecy, or a song to give.

Consider the imprisoned sister whom we mentioned at the beginning of this article. This woman KNEW Jesus. He had changed her life. NOTHING was going to stop her. She knew that people's souls were at stake and she needed to show them the way to Heaven. Even if it was at the cost of her life, she had to tell of Jesus. After all, He had given His life for her.

**Jeremiah 20:9** ~ *Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*

Is God's Word like fire in your bones? Is He so alive in you that you cannot keep quiet? This is the relationship we must have with our LORD Jesus if we are going to survive rough days ahead.

**2 Timothy 3:12** ~ *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

Occupying a pew is not sufficient; we MUST commune with our God daily. We must talk with Him and spend time in His Word. We must know for sure that what we believe is true. We must be talking with people about God and seeing Him work miracles in our lives now. We must help our children to understand that they, too, must have the same faith as the apostles when they said, "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" ... and when they prayed, "*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*"

We need to keep pressing on in our faith so that no matter what lies ahead, we and our children will be strong enough to stand.