

“*Courageously Standing Alone!*”

Acts 24:10-21

Intro. – It has long been thought that Julius Caesar was the first. He was not. I’m referring to children being born by what is now called Cesarean section or C-section. This is a medical procedure where the infant is surgically removed from the mother’s womb. The first recorded C-section whereby the mother and baby survived, was performed in Switzerland in A.D. 1500 by a man named Jacob. His accomplishment was a medical milestone. Until 1500 and even after, C-sections were half successful for you see this procedure was done when the mother had already died and the baby alone was left to save.

Fran Nufer was the patient’s name. She was young, attractive, and a very strong Swiss wife. There was no early indication that her labor would be difficult, but it was. With her child well overdue, Mrs. Nufer was bedridden in pure agony for days. In keeping with the medical practices of the sixteenth century, Mrs. Nufer’s doctors refused to perform the surgery which might save her life... Why? She was not dead! There was one, however, in their midst who disagreed; his name was Jacob. Mrs. Nufer did not have to die, he told the others she was young, strong and had everything going for her and the baby... Incensed at this idea and not wanting to be accomplices in the “murder” of Mrs. Nufer, the *conformist* physicians left the room. Jacob was left alone with the some frightened midwives and a delirious mother.

Removing the instruments from his bag, Jacob realized if he succeeded in this he would be a hero. If he failed he would be an assassin. Within the hour, Jacob emerged from Mrs. Nufer’s room a hero. His patient was alive, safe and resting well, as was her newborn child. Mrs. Nufer lived to bear other children without complications. She lived to be seventy-seven years old.

This surgical success achieved by Jacob back in A.D.1500 would not be repeated with any frequent success until anesthetics and antiseptics. Mrs. Nufer was blessed for you see Jacob was no doctor. He was a butcher. He was also the husband of Mrs. Nufer and the child’s father. Jacob Nufer stood alone!

Purpose: learning to have courage to stand alone for TRUTH

How did Nufer do it? How can we do it or can we? The Holy Spirit inspired writer gives key insights for being courageous and being able to stand for truth alone if necessary:

I THE NECESSITY OF STANDING ALONE

A. Christians Are Called to Take a Stand

1. As our society becomes increasingly pagan, you and I will be called upon to take stands for most unpopular matters...(e.g. sinfulness of practicing homosexual acts... defending the unborn... etc.)
2. John 15:18-20 *“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me they will persecute you...”*
3. Illus. – 12/9/85 *US News & World Report* article entitled “Morality Test.” First line said, “Many Americans today are stretching the boundaries of traditional morality.” 1000 Americans were asked, “Is it wrong for a man and woman to have sexual relations before marriage?” 20% thought it was wrong... 52% said they would vote for a homosexual if running for President... This survey showed a permissive attitude in most every moral issue.

B. Christians Are to be “Peculiar”

1. 1 Peter 2:9 *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possessions, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*
2. I.e. Christians are to live *distinctive* lives regardless of how pagan society is:
 - a. right and wrong are not determined by poles, economy or the news media... determined by X!
 - b. Romans 12:1-2 *“I urge you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*
 - c. Mark 13:31 *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”*

3. Anytime one goes against “popular opinion” it will take extraordinary courage... peer pressure is real... no one wants to be thought of as weird... Question is – approval of God or of man?...
4. Courage is necessary to stand for TRUTH regardless of the threats:
 - a. Illus. – the party aboard ship was in full swing. Speeches were being made by the captain and crew, all directed in honor of a 70 year old who was doing his best to accept the praise directed toward him. Earlier that morning a young woman had fallen overboard and within seconds this elderly gentleman was in the cold waters at her side. The woman was rescued and the elderly man became an instant hero. When time finally came for the brave passenger to speak, the stateroom fell into a hush. He went to the microphone and in what was probably the shortest “hero’s” speech ever offered said these words: “I just want to know one thing – who pushed me?”
 - b. Moses before Pharaoh, David before Goliath, Esther before King Ahasuerus, Elijah before the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel, Paul in Athens...
5. Our situation may not be as dramatic, still called upon to take a stand for TRUTH – e.g. at school, work, daily activities. Moral cowardice always leads to disaster, but courage leads to victory!

II ONE EXAMPLE OF STANDING ALONE

- 2 Timothy 4:16 “*At my first defense no one supported me, but, all deserted me...*”
 - Paul stood in this courtroom all alone – talk about standing alone!
- A. Paul Stood Before Felix
 1. Felix not the man you wanted as your judge – background: born a slave, but, by pulling the right political strings became the first slave to become governor of Roman province.
 2. He was ruthless – Tacitus (Roman historian) wrote of him, “...he exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave.”
 3. His personal life was a wreck – been married two times prior to Drusilla, daughter of Herod Agrippa I (beheaded James)... seduced her from her first husband...
 4. Jews hated Felix and Felix hated Jews, but, now all are buddies because Paul, the Xtian is on trial!
 - B. Paul Accused by Tertullus
 1. Articulate attorney – was considered the best of the best – kind of like a modern day Roy Black...
 2. Begins with flattery and does he ever lay it on thick:
 - Illus. – salesman being commended for outstanding job by his boss. “To what do you attribute your success?” “My first 5 words when ladies come to door – ‘Miss, is your mother home?’”
 3. Three serious but utterly false and fabricated charges:
 - a. treason against Rome (24:5)
 - b. leader of illegal religion (24:5)
 - c. defiled the temple (24:6)
 - C. Paul Gives His Defense
 1. Paul before unscrupulous judge, lying attorney, & a hostile crowd. Would you know what to say?
 - Paul says, “gladly make defense (v 10) = during which he maintained his poise/integrity!
 2. Vv 11-13 = calm makes clear in no way did he stir up riots against Rome
 3. Vv 14-15 = what he proclaimed not illegal “religion” = culmination of Judaism...
 4. V 18 = clear when he was in the Temple he did NOT defile it!

All alone, Paul calmly/courageously refuted every charge!

III REASONS FOR STANDING ALONE

- A. A Clear Conscience
 1. V 16 “*In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.*”
 2. If one consistently violates their conscience, guilt will undermine their courage, guilt will remove conviction from one’s voice and sincerity from one’s eyes.
 - a. Samuel Jackson – “Shame arises from the fear of men, courage from the fear of God.”

- b. Illus. – Robert Flood *Rebirth of America* – “One of the great American myths is that we are all a bunch of individualists. We would like to think that, but it simply is not true... We imagine ourselves a mixture of Patrick Henry, Davy Crockett, John Wayne, and the prophet Daniel. But the truth of the matter is... rather than rugged individualists, we are more like Gulliver of old, tied down and immobilized by tiny strands of fear, real or imagined... We see these symptoms... throughout society, but the most visible one is loss of courage. People stand by and watch a fellow citizen being beaten or stabbed and they do not interfere. They are afraid. Our political leaders watch Communism gobble up other nations and they do nothing. They are afraid. People complain in private about the state of affairs but will not speak out in public. They are afraid.”
- c. Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Harvard Commencement Address, 6-8-78) “Must one point out that from ancient times a decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?”

B. Awareness of God’s Presence

- 1. 2 Timothy 4:16-17 “*At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth.*”
- 2. Paul knew when he stood in that “courtroom” alone, God stood beside him – Paul + God made a majority no matter the numbers against him.
- 3. Contrast Paul’s courage to Felix’s fear – afraid because no clear conscience and wasn’t aware of God’s presence!

Conclusion: A few days later Felix sent for Paul and listened to him speak. If you were Paul and you had the private audience with the man who held your life in the balance and he was living with his third wife, a wife gotten in an illicit fashion, what would you say?

Story told of a guest preacher nudged by the host preacher while sitting together. “Don’t preach against drinking today,” said the host preacher, “There’s a guy in the audience who likes to drink and is a big giver.”

“Don’t preach against adultery. One of our deacons has a daughter who ran off with another deacon.”

“Don’t preach about stewardship. There’s a wealthy man present who really gets offended if you start preaching on money.”

After hearing all of this the guest preacher was a bit unnerved, so he asked, “What can I preach?” The host preacher looked around and said, “Give it to the Pharisees! There’s not a Jew in the house.”

If you were Paul, what would you say before Felix and Drusilla? Paul went straight to the heart of the matter. He spoke of faith in Christ – righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. What resulted? Felix became frightened!

What a contrast between the courage of Paul standing alone and Felix, who stood with the majority; yet, he trembled. Here then is my point: one who fears God need fear nothing else. One who fears not God needs to fear everything! Be courageous brethren! Courageously Stand Alone!