

"A Time to Be Bold"
Philippians 1:12-14/Acts 16:25-34
June 13, 2010
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I. Introduction

I was half way up an 80 foot cliff. Being a youth group leader often puts you in interesting situations. It was about 15 years ago, and I had taken our church youth group on a rock climbing trip. We spent the morning with our instructors practicing rock climbing skills. It was now afternoon, and time to use those new skills.

Being the leader, I thought it important to go first. So I put the harness on, and got hooked up to a rope that went to the top of the cliff, through a pulley, and back down. The idea was that as I climbed up a team of youth group members at the bottom of the cliff would pull the rope down, taking up the slack. Then if I slipped or fell, the youth group holding the rope would catch me.

So off I went, practicing the climbing skills we had learned. And as I climbed the youth group took up the slack in the rope. All was going well until about half way up, when the instructor shouted to me, "Lean back on the rope." I knew what he wanted. He wanted me to plant my feet, and lean way back without holding onto the cliff, to show the kids that the rope would hold them. So I took a deep breath, and leaned back. Everything was fine. But then the instructor shouted to me, "No, lean back without holding onto the rope." Now for some reason that made me a little nervous. I don't know why. I trusted the rope and the harness. I trusted the instructor and the kids holding the rope. But leaning back without holding the rope.....that was a challenge. But I knew it was important in that time and place to do that. So I took a deep breath, said a quick prayer, and leaned back.....with my hands off the rope. As I leaned back the rope gave a little with a jerk (which was startling).....but it held just fine. After about five seconds, which seemed like an eternity, I decided that was enough, so I leaned forward, and finished the climb.

I've thought some about that. I think the difference between leaning back and hanging onto the rope, and leaning back and not hanging onto the rope.....has something to do with the difference between partial and complete trust. Leaning back while hanging onto the rope meant I still had some control in my hands. But leaning back without hanging on.....it was complete trust.....completely out of my hands....completely trust the rope, harness and kids on the ground.

It was one of those life lessons.....40 feet off the ground. And it raises other questions about trust; trusting friends, trusting those I love.....trusting God.

II. Text

As Paul writes to his friends in Philippi he reflects on his own life lesson, being in prison, and encourages his friends to lean back, let go of the rope, and trust God. **Read Philippians 1:12-14.**

III. Exegesis

As Paul wrote this letter to his friends in Philippi he knew it would be read in church. Knowing that, I began to think about the questions people might have in that church in Philippi, and how they might hear what Paul had to say. So I came up with a dialogue between Paul and the church in Philippi.

Church in Philippi (CP)#1-Paul's in prison. He's been arrested for sharing about Jesus. It makes you stop and think; should I share about Jesus? If this can happen to Paul, what about us? What about me? If the message of Jesus is from God, why does this happen? If the Church is of God, why do we have these humiliating defeats? I can hear my non-Christian neighbors now; "We hear your church leader, Paul, is in prison."

Paul (P)#1-Friends, I want you to know something; what has happened to me has served the Christian faith. Wherever I am, and whatever I'm doing, I share about Jesus, and amazing things happen. I'm seeing it right now in prison!

CP#2-What do you mean? How does being in prison spread the story about Jesus?

P#2-I just share the story of Jesus. I tell about Jesus. The guards are stuck with me, so they have to hear about Jesus. And they, then, share about "this prisoner named Paul in the cell down there," and the story of Jesus. They know I have been arrested only because I've shared the story of Jesus. I've only been here a few weeks, and all the Roman guards know. All of them! I could have never got this audience to preach the gospel if I wasn't in prison. God is amazing.

CP#3-Wow! I guess we've seen this before. When Paul was here he was thrown in prison for sharing about Jesus. And amazing things happened then, including an earthquake and the conversion of the jailer. That really got the church going. Paul was faithful in prison then. He's faithful in prison now. God seems to use unexpected situations.....surprising situations, to get the message about Jesus out.

P#3-It takes trust.....a bold trust in God. The God who promised a child to the aged couple Abraham and Sarah.....the God who used Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt.....the God who raised Jesus Christ from death to life.....this God turns situations on their heads, and does amazing things. And it takes bold trust to be part of God's plan.

CP#4-Seeing Paul's boldness in prison gives us courage. Watching Paul share about Jesus in prison gives us courage to share. Hearing about the amazing things God does through a faithful Christian gives us hope.

P#4-And let me tell you something else. Other Christians in this town have heard about what's happening here.....they've heard about my imprisonment and sharing about Jesus.....they've heard about all the guards talking about Jesus. And so they're encouraged.....they're bold.....they're sharing. In a pagan world sometimes hostile to Christian faith.....the story is shared.....and the church grows. It is the work and plan of God.

CP#5-If God is at work in the boldness of Paul in prison, though it is not easy, we can be bold here in Philippi. We are not afraid. It is a time to be bold for Jesus.

IV. Reflections

If God is at work in the boldness of Jesus.....if God is at work in the boldness of Paul in prison....and if God is at work in the boldness of the Philippians.....we are not afraid. It is a time to be bold for Jesus.

It's a different world than it was 30 years ago, or 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago. This is not a Christian culture. It's time to be bold for Jesus....

.....and trade in "It's all about me".....

.....trade in "bigger and better".....

.....trade in "have it your way".....

.....trade in "obey your thirst".....

.....trade in this endless journey for my own comfort, and the illusion of control.....

.....trade it in for Jesus' Way.

It's time to for us to be bold, and share about Jesus.....to be bold and make a difference where we're really needed.....to be bold and find life by giving our lives away to help the poor, lonely, homeless, hungry, and sick. It's time to be bold.....to share and show Jesus' love.

(Play video: "Trust the Almighty" by Rightnow, Trader Illustrations Vol. 1)

It's time to lean back, let go of the rope, and trust God.....right now, right where we are. It's time to be bold for God.

V. Appendix: Summary of Acts 16:11-24 (to be read before Acts 16:25-34)

Paul came to Philippi because of a dream. He dreamed that a man said, "Come and help us," so Paul came to Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, with Roman laws, religion and retired veterans from the army. It was not a place friendly to things non-Roman.

A small church began there when Paul met with a few people who were praying and seeking God. Paul shared about Jesus, a few people believed, and the small church started. Paul stayed to help the church get going.

There was a slave girl in Philippi who was possessed by an evil spirit. The evil spirit gave her the ability to tell fortunes, and her owners made money off her fortune telling. One day she followed Paul and Silas around town and shouted, "These men are servants of God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." She kept this up for quite a while. Finally Paul got so annoyed he cast the evil spirit out of the woman.

When the girl's owners saw that her ability to tell fortunes, and their ability to make money off her, was gone, they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the town judges. They charged them with disturbing the city and spreading religion against Roman beliefs and law. A crowd quickly gathered and joined in the verbal attacks. To satisfy the owners and the crowd, the judges had Paul and Silas beaten, and thrown in prison. They were in an inner cell, and their feet were in stocks.

Read Acts 16:25-34