

How Brave Is Your Heart?

by Staff

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One of the most popular movies of 1995 was *Braveheart*, starring Mel Gibson as William Wallace (c. 1270-1305), who led a Scottish rebellion against the British beginning in 1297. The Scots had for many years suffered abuse from the English, particularly King Edward I, and finally revolted under the courageous and patriotic leadership of Wallace, a small landowner. In the end, however, after stunning victories, he was betrayed by companions pretending to be loyal to the Scottish cause, and with his execution in 1305, the fledgling independence movement received a severe blow.

On the other hand, Wallace's courageous leadership and death provided the Scots with a martyr, and in 1306, Robert the Bruce (1274-1329) became Scotland's King Robert I. Eight years later Robert and his army of rebellious Scots successfully threw the English out by decisively winning the Battle of Bannockburn against a larger force. The Treaty of Northampton in 1328 confirmed Scottish independence.

Bravery or courage is a character trait Christians need to possess. As Psalm 31:24 says, "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD." Paul encourages the Corinthians, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (I Corinthians 16:13) during their walk with God. Solomon tells us, "The righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).

Christian Bravehearts

For one thing, we have an enemy more ferocious, cunning and deadly than any predator, Satan the Devil. He "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). He is subtle, using trickery and confusion to get us to sin (Genesis 3:1; Revelation 12:9). In this end time, Satan is working harder than ever to make us fall: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

Physical weaponry and armor do no good against an enemy like this, so God has made spiritual armor available for our protection. Ephesians 6:11-12 advises us:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Many servants of God had to face hardships, controversy and persecution in their time of testing, and the Bible shows us how they bore them with a brave heart:

» Job lost everything except his wife, and at one point wanted God to take his own life (Job 3:3). But his faith in God never wavered: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

» Daniel would not compromise on God's ways, even though all of Darius' counselors plotted to take his life (Daniel 6). He would rather be thrown to the lions than fail to worship God.

» Paul lived from peril to peril throughout his ministry. His list of persecutions—including whippings, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks and robberies—attests to his brave heart in God's service (II Corinthians 11:23-28).

» Of course, our Savior Jesus Christ boldly went to His crucifixion so that we could have forgiveness from sin and access to God. "When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (I Peter 2:23).

True grit often comes in a mixed bag. A person can be courageous in some areas of life and very fearful in others. In the beginning of his ministry, Moses was like this. As a prince of Egypt, he had led that nation's armies against its enemies, but when God asked him to speak for Him before Pharaoh, he balked (Exodus 4:10-13). After Moses' death, God repeatedly reminded Joshua, the commander of Israel's army, to "be strong and very courageous" in leading God's people into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:6-7, 9).

Others of God's prophets, such as Jonah, ran from His call, yet later proved courageous. Barak needed the presence of Deborah to stiffen his backbone against the army of King Jabin, but he successfully led Israel to victory at Mount Tabor (Judges 4-5). Gideon needed a lot of convincing before he took up the mantle as judge over Israel (Judges 6-8). Doing God's work seems to be a primary fear.

End-Time Bravehearts

Throughout the years of our calling, we need a brave heart to overcome sin, temptations, trials and afflictions. Even now, we may face minor persecutions from family, friends, employers and neighbors who do not understand our beliefs or want to force us to compromise. The toughest times, though, are still before us, and they will require a brave and steadfast heart of us.

To make it through these increasingly troublesome times, we will need a close, trusting relationship with God, for it is from Him that true courage comes. Paul tells Timothy that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). The apostle John writes:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (I John 4:18).

So if we are growing in a loving relationship with God, our courage should also be growing along with it.

We also need to remember that though we may be involved in the events of the end time, the battle is not ours alone. In the time of King Jehoshaphat, when Judah was faced with overwhelming odds, a Levite named Jahaziel told the people, "Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's'" (II Chronicles 20:15). He will bring us the victory. Knowing this should instill great boldness in us.

God proclaims in Revelation 21:8 that the cowardly will not be in His Kingdom. In order to make sure we have the necessary courage, the boldness God requires, we must seek Him and ask Him to put a brave heart in us just as He did with many other saints in times past. We have the abilities to finish this course successfully with His help.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:19-23)

Whether we live through the great troubles of the end time or die in martyrdom for our cause as William Wallace did for his, we need to testify before the world of God's way with a brave heart. Now is the time to ask ourselves, "How brave is my heart?" so that if and when the time comes for us to stand for our convictions, we will be ready.