

Could You Stand Alone?

Preparing To Make a Quality Witness

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The Tiananmen Square protests were a series of demonstrations led by labor activists, students, and intellectuals in the People's Republic of China. It took place between mid-April and early June of 1989. The protesters were generally against the *authoritarianism* and the economic policies of the ruling communist party. This was before they started making reforms. The protesters also wanted democratic reforms, which they have not gotten, but China has opened up economically.

The demonstrations centered on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, but there were other large, peaceful protests all over China. But in Beijing, they got to be so big that the government felt that they needed to crack down, so they sent in the military. There was a clash. And the casualty figures really are not known. Some say two or three hundred, some say as many as two or three thousand. It is still hard to get accurate information out of China.

The lasting image of these protests was an event that took place on June 5, 1989, near Tiananmen Square. It was on Chang'an Avenue, which leads to the Forbidden City. So, it was right dead center of Beijing. The Chinese military crackdown had only just started that day.

As several tanks approached Tiananmen Square, on Chang'an Avenue, one man stood alone in the middle of the street. He held two bags, one in each hand, as if he had just come from shopping. As the tanks stopped in front of him, he waved them away with one of his bags. And in response, the front tank tried to go around him; first to the right, and then to the left, but the man would just step over into its path. And so, the driver of the tank stopped it, and shut off the engine.

And then the man stood there for a moment, and then decided to climb up on the tank and bang on the hatch. He got down, and there was a head that popped out of the hatch, and the man said something to the driver. It is not clear what was said. It was out in the middle of this broad street. It must have been something like, "Why are you here? My city is in chaos because of you!" Or, it might have been something like, "Go back! Turn around! Stop killing my people!" Or, it may have been something as simple as, "Go away!" We are not sure what he said, because most of the cameras that caught this episode were at his back, so we cannot even try to read his lips.

But he stood there—he stood his ground. And then a few moments later, a man rode up on a bicycle, and then a moment later, people came from the curb, and then they got around him, and escorted him off into the crowd. And he disappeared.

To this day in the west, it is not known who that man was. There is no name to put on that man's face. More importantly, no one knows what became of him. There are speculative rumors that he was caught that day, and executed two weeks later. However, there are other stories that he was imprisoned. And there are still others that say that he actually got away, and is living incognito in China someplace.

Of the one billion people in China, one man dared to defy the might of an oppressive regime, and its brutal military. One man! He made no great speech. He made no glorious charge through a hail of bullets. He did not get run over by the tank. He just boldly stood in front of those tanks alone—one man—alone.

My question today is: Could we do that? Could we stand alone? Do we have what it takes to defy the powers that be? If our lives were on the line, and no deliverance seemed apparent at all, would we have the faith and courage to stand firm spiritually? I am not talking about leading a rebellion, here. I am talking about spiritual integrity.

Another question is: How well do we stand our ground now, when the sun is shining and times are still pretty good (despite \$4 gasoline)? Could we stand alone? You must answer that for yourself.

Herbert W. Armstrong died in early January 1986. That was twenty-two and one-half years ago now. Within the next few months, Joseph Tkach and his band of heretical men slowly began to change the doctrines. It started almost immediately. They started flip-flopping on this and that, and by the next Passover, we had a new doctrine in the church.

And not too long thereafter, the Worldwide Church of God began to fracture. There is a direct correlation between the doctrine changes and the fracturing.

By December 1989, one major group had already formed. The Church of the Great God formed in January 1992, while the Global Church of God formed in January 1993. The United Church of God formed in the spring of 1995.

Within nine years, a huge chunk of the Church of God had split away into several groups. And this is not to mention the many, many, many individuals who left the Worldwide Church of God, and never looked back. They were just absorbed into the world—absorbed into this world's churches, or have become so turned off about church at all, that they do not do a thing with anyone religiously.

There are now people out there who keep records of how many splinter groups there are from the Worldwide Church of God, and it goes into the several hundreds, little bits here, little bits there. But the process of disintegration is continuing bit by bit. And the chances of it turning around are rather bleak.

Turn to Daniel to a very well known passage of a prophecy describing the end time. And the angel says to Daniel:

Daniel 12:4-7 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

We have recognized this as the end-time. Everything is helter-skelter. People are indeed running to and fro, like ants in an anthill. Flying here, flitting there; going here, winding up there. People are in just a mad rush.

You have seen these time-lapsed clips of some place like Times Square. And they play back the clip in fast-forward, which has everyone speeded up, and you see all the people moving so hysterically fast all over the place, as if they are mad. It is still called the rat race. They do similar things recording freeway traffic at night, and you see streams of light from these headlights, and taillights. It seems continuous.

Our world is a picture of movement, or better yet, a moving picture. It is not still. It is never static. It is always dynamic and moving. There is never any time for stillness at all.

And knowledge, of course, is increasing—doubling every year or so now. The last I heard, it was about 14 months, and it is getting closer all the time that it doubles.

The bad news for us realizing that it is the end-time, is that the power of the holy people—the saints—will gradually wane as time winds down to Christ's return.

Think of the people as an old crystal glass bowl. And it falls, and it breaks into several large pieces. And then you see all those pieces of the bowl picked up again, and dropped onto the floor again. And the pieces and splinters keep getting smaller and smaller.

How much time has gone on, we do not know. This scripture does not say. But the picture here is actually of a hand made of potter's clay, baked in a kiln, and it has been dropped. The hand symbolizes power—the ability to work. And that hand is being dropped. The actual word for power in this scripture is the Hebrew word for hand. It is this hand being dropped, and a few fingers come off. All is picked up, and thrown on the floor again. And it gets shattered again. And by the time that Christ returns all you have is a pile of dust. That hand of the holy people will be completely shattered, and then the end will be here. That is terrifying.

Jesus said as He was watching His ministry winding down,

John 9:4 "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.

And we are facing the same kind of countdown. The power—the hand—of the holy people—their ability to do a work—is being slowly shattered. The saint's power to work will be progressively reduced to total debility. He is describing here a state of absolute weakness, and ineffectiveness.

There is a similar, maybe even a parallel, illustration found in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:1-2 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

He is probably thinking, first of all, about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and later on as things went on, the Jews continuing to rebel, by about 135, they pretty much had it all cleared off. There was not anything left. Not one stone left upon another.

Is there a spiritual parallel with the church in the end-time? The church, stone by stone, is being torn down, until not one is left supporting another. They are all lying on the ground alone.

We may be forced to stand alone—you and me. We may not have a congregation to lose ourselves in, or even to back us up, and lend us strength. Those who remain alive until the return of Christ may indeed face this lonely, scary prospect—standing alone.

Could we stand alone if we were made to? Could we make the proper witness for God as if we were the last believer left alive on the earth—at least the last believer in sight? It is a sobering possibility. Could we stand alone?

I do not want to leave you there. Obviously, I have got plenty of time remaining for my sermon, so I want to give you a little shot in the arm.

Let us start by reading some scriptures. We need some encouragement thinking that we might end up standing alone as things are getting bad, and worse.

Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

In John 14, our Savior speaking to His disciples, even though He was going to be going away, says to them,

John 14:18 "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

And He is with us, and He is in us, just as He goes on to tell us in those next few verses.

In Matthew 28, Jesus is talking to His disciples, and sending them out,

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

We get an idea of just who it is who is giving us these instructions; the One who is all mighty, and all powerful, with all authority. He says,

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

When all things are splintering, and scattering down into the little pieces of dust, when there is not one little pebble left to stand on another, yet He is with us, even to that glorious end! He is there.

Finally, in Hebrews 13, just to put a capstone on this, and in a way, bookend this set of scriptures, the author writes,

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have [or where you have been placed, or what you have been given to do]. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

There is some hope and some encouragement. As long as we remain faithful, we will never truly be alone. God is with us. "God-is-there," is one of His names—God is there. He promises never to leave us, no not ever to forsake us. Never!

He will provide the strength we need, no matter what the situation is. No matter how few people are around us to support us, no matter how many guns are pointed in our direction, no matter what it is that we have to say or not say, He is there, and will be with us.

But it is not always easy to stand alone. Some of the greatest Christians have had problems standing alone. I want to go one example of Elijah in I Kings 19. This is a very sobering example, that such a great man, such a great prophet for God, who had done such good works for Him—powerful works—could not always stand alone. He could in one situation. In chapter 18, he did great! But then, in chapter 19, he fails. So this is going to be our bad example. We need to learn from it, and remember the lessons just in case we are ever called upon to stand alone.

I Kings 19:1-2 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets [of Baal] with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

So Jezebel sends a note to him, and says, "You're mine, buddy. My guards have a 'shoot-to-kill' order on your head."

I Kings 19:3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

I find this odd. He was terrified that Jezebel was going to get him, and kill him. And so, he takes his servant with him, and then when he gets to a certain point, Beersheba, he sends away the only solace that he had among humans—his servant. Now he was really alone, except for God.

I Kings 19:4-5 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."

This goes on, and it happens again. And then,

I Kings 19:8-9 So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. And there he went into a cave,

It might be better, "the cave," because some think that it is the exact same cave from which Moses saw God when he asked Him to reveal Himself to him.

I Kings 19:9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"Didn't I send you to Samaria? What are you doing here?" So Elijah said,

I Kings 19:10-13 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then He [God] said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by [very much like He did for Moses], and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.

I find that strange, because God had told him to go out, but the next time that you see Elijah doing anything, he is still in the cave, and then he comes out. I just noticed that. I wonder if it's significant.

I Kings 19:13-16 Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then the LORD said to him: "Go! Return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

I Kings 19:18 "Yet [listen, Elijah] I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Now this happened starting on the very next day after his great victory on Mount Carmel. And once Jezebel said, "I'm going to have your head, Elijah," the man hits absolute rock bottom. He is terrified, and he becomes almost manic-depressive. He had been on the highest of highs after slaying the prophets of Baal, and revealing God to the people. And then he swings from that high to the depths of depression—he goes from peak to trough in almost an instant. "Oh, no, Jezebel's going to get me! Run!" And so, he gets out of there.

What is the first thing that Elijah does when he gets a chance? "God, kill me! Jezebel is after me!" God refuses, of course. But, what does God do? Instead of killing him, He gives him sustenance, aid, and encouragement. He sends an angel to him twice! "Here eat this. Drink this. You need the strength to go on your journey. I think I know where you're headed." Twice He gives him what he needs. He supports him.

It should have been obvious to Elijah that God was with him. God was taking care of him. He knew what was happening. He was aware that Jezebel had put out a warrant for his arrest and death. God was certainly aware of everything that was going on. God knew that Elijah had left his servant. He knew that he had dropped all his bags, and all that he had was the clothes on this back, and the sandals on his feet, and he was going out into the wilderness with nothing, and he needed the help, and so God sends it. God was aware. God was there.

Yet, Elijah would not even let God break him out of his despair. His was the bottomless pit of despair. It was the "slough-of-despond," as John Bunyan might call it. He was so low and slogging through all of his feelings and fears that even miracles did not move him. His despair, his depression, his despondency (whatever you want to call it) is an almost complete and utter lack of faith.

How did Elijah get from there to here in one day? It is hard to imagine. But, he must have feared Jezebel something awful. She must have been some sort of witch or something. Maybe she got things done. And he knew it. But, he feared for his life, to such an extent that not even God could bring him out of it.

I do not know the reason why he lost all his confidence in God. And it is even harder to understand after God did all these things for him. It is just really strange. But it shows you just what human nature can do, and how strong it is, and how we have got to be careful that we do not let it get its grip on us again.

Notice in verses 10 and 14 that his replies to God were exactly the same. "I have been zealous for the Lord God of hosts—the children of Israel have forsaken the covenant—they have killed your prophets with the sword—I am alone, and left—and now they seek to kill me too."

It is almost like he was on auto-pilot, saying the same thing. What had happened between the two responses? There was the wind that tore the mountainside, there was the earthquake with things falling all around him, there was a fire that swept across the mountain, and there was this still small voice. Do you not think that something in there might have shaken him a little bit and he might have given God a little bit different response? "God, now I'm beginning to understand that you are with me," or something. I do not know what. But when God asked him the question the second time, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" he answers with the exact same words.

Despite God's argument, in terms of His great power, and that still, small voice, there had been no movement in Elijah's attitude at all. And when God saw that Elijah was going to be so pig-headed, and faithless toward Him, He says, "Go anoint these guys, and make sure that you anoint your successor too. You are done. I cannot use you anymore."

And then He lets him know, "Look buddy, I've been pretty patient with you. Sure these things have been happening. But I've been busy! I have seven thousand other people that you're not even aware of because you're so stuck on yourself. You alone are left? Hogwash! There are seven thousand more! How did you get so caught up in yourself?" This is essentially what God tells Elijah.

What is the lesson?—Elijah limited God. He fixated on his own situation, and saw no solution in sight. Yes, he was in danger. Yes, Jezebel was a piece of work; she was a heathen; she was violent; and she got her way—sure. Yes, true religion was at a very low point in Israel at the time, and it needed to be revived. But, God was on His throne. He was still in control. And just as God had

defeated the prophets of Baal, He could squash Jezebel like a bug if He wanted to. But, Elijah was consumed with "woe-is-me" disease.

His situation, as bad as it was (and I am not trying to take away from the fear that he felt, and how real the situation was), he let his situation become bigger than God in his own mind. And then he simply ignored God, and ignored all the things that God was going to do for him, all the avenues of escape that He provided for him. He forgot God's power and ability to deliver him out of any problem. He focused on the problem, not the Problem Solver. It got him into deep trouble. He was not able to stand.

Elijah seems such a paragon. The Jews equate Moses and Elijah. Moses was the great lawgiver. Elijah was the great prophet. It just does not make any sense here that he ended up like this. But he did! It is an amazing thing to me.

What do the Jews think about Samson? He is the judge that messed around. But he is my good example! Turn to Judges 15. Even though we went through this on my series on Samson, I take a great deal of encouragement out of this passage. I think it is just great! I believe that this was the high point of Samson's career. But in many ways, this passage is the perfect opposite of the passage we just read regarding Elijah. There are so many parallels that it is amazing to me.

Judges 15:9-10 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

"He has been killing our men! Give him to us. Let us go get him. We are going to put him to death."

Judges 15:11-20 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us? [They are attacking us because of the things you have done to them.]" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them. [All I have done is retaliated in kind.]" But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves." So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!" And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi [Jawbone Heights]. Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Like I said, this scene from his life is parallel but opposite to what happened with Elijah. Unlike Elijah, Samson was truly alone. At least Elijah had his servant, and he chucked him overboard as soon as he could. But Samson was alone in the Rock at Etam. He was alone. It was his own people, men of Israel, who were up there to arrest him, and hand him over to be put to death. He did not even have his own people to fall back on! He had no one but God. And he knew it.

Notice Samson's calm demeanor. When the 3,000 men of Judah came up to him, and to speak with him, and ask him—"Why are you doing this, Samson? Why are you making such a fuss? Why are you getting us into trouble?"—all Samson says is, "What they did to me, I have done to them." It is not like he made a big thing of it. "I'm just defending what is ours."

Then they tell him that they are going to arrest him, and hand him over to the Philistines. And all he said in reply was, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves. I do not want to be killed by my own people." And so, they say to him, "Okay, fine. But, we are going to bind you, and we are going to bind you securely." He does not give them any fight. He goes very calmly. He is not belligerent. He is not unreasonable. All he does is extract the promise from them, and allows himself to be bound and led away to the Philistine camp. He went peacefully like a sheep to the slaughter, you might say. He did not bleat, even. He did not try to fight back. He allowed himself to be bound, and walked peacefully there.

But when the Philistines shouted against Samson (and I have got a sneaking suspicion they made a few comments about God as well), who was it who acted? God did. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily. He was standing there bound with new ropes and as docile as he could be. And God fills him with His Spirit, and says, "Samson, go to work."

He was the One who gave Samson the strength through His Spirit. He infused him with His power, and sent Samson out against them.

What did Samson do? Samson found a weapon. He used it, as crude as it was, and killed a thousand men with it. God was able to work out deliverance by him, because Samson allowed himself to be used by God. He did not fight God. He did not question God. He did not say, "Woe is me! I am now going down into the camp of the Philistines to be slain! Is there not a deliverer in Israel?"

No, but rather he just went. He waited. He was patient. He was calm. He let matters develop, and when God made His move, he acted—hip and thigh.

Notice that even though God filled him with His Spirit, and gave him the strength, and did all these things for him, Samson worked, and worked, and worked some more to within an inch of his life. It took everything he had to produce deliverance that day. He was there on the ground, saying to God, "Please do something! I am not going to make it! What kind of witness is this going to be if I perish after doing all this, and my enemies take me anyway?" God hears him, and responds to him, giving him what he needs—a spring of water opens up right next to him. I get the impression that he did not even have to crawl to it. It was just there for him. All he had to do was lap it up. God was there. He called, and God answered.

And what else was there? Unlike Elijah, whose office was taken away, Samson was given 20 years. Like I said, it is the opposite, but parallel. It is very interesting that a man like Samson could make

such a beautiful witness as this, whereas a man like Elijah, as faithful and powerful as he was for God, could go so wrong. It is just an amazing thing for me to think about, and the comparison to make.

Samson is an example of something that Jesus spoke about in Luke 21. This is in Luke's version of the Olivet Prophecy,

Luke 21:10-19 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.

Such occasions of persecution have happened in God's church before. We have the promise here that before He returns, persecutions will happen again because He desires to make a witness to the world before the end. And He will use some of us to do it, like He says here, before rulers, and kings, and before the whole world. He wants people to know before He comes that He is in complete control. What He says will come to pass. These people are going to be playing with fire when they go up against Him.

We have the warning here. We should not be surprised if some of us should be asked to do such a thing sometime in the future. And Jesus says, "Even though this is a scary prospect, don't worry! Don't make firm plans about what you are going to tell them. Don't even set it up in your mind that you're going to use this point, and that point, because I will give you the words you shall speak. I will put them in your mouth, and you can speak My wisdom to them, not yours. I will give them what they need to hear through you," just as He did with Samson.

Samson was going down there. It does not seem like he had a plan. The only thing was that he was going to be bound, and brought down to their camp, surrounded by his enemies. And God used him.

As soon as he was in sight of all those Philistines, God gave him the power to kill them. That was not a plan. That was suicide, to an ordinary man. God made use of the circumstance that he was in, and gave him the tools to produce the deliverance, to make the witness. And Samson, being compliant toward God, did it.

This is the same way that we need to go into such a thing that might happen with us. God will fill us with His Spirit, as He did with Samson, and He will reveal the weapon that we can use to make the witness that He desires us to make. It probably will not be a physical weapon. As it says here, "It is words and wisdom." He gave us the example of Samson in a physical form so that we can see it, and understand what went on. But with us, it is words and wisdom. Those are our weapons.

What is the offensive weapon in the armor of God?—the sword of the Spirit.

Our challenge, then, is to be like Samson—malleable in God's hands, being meek and useful for His purpose, and not be distraught like Elijah was, so that we will not be comforted, and if we are not going to allow being comforted, we certainly are not going to be used. We have to strike the right attitude—to be willing to be used by God for His purposes, whatever they may be.

Notice that it will not always work out, that we would be delivered unscathed. We will certainly be loathed. It says that we will be hated for His Name's sake. Some will die. That is what it says here. They will send some of you to your death. You may be betrayed to your death. Yet, Jesus also says that not a hair of your head will be lost. Is that a contradiction? Some of you will go to your death, but not a hair of your head will be lost. That is comforting, is it not?

This is not a contradiction. It is a proverbial saying. It means that God will preserve you whole and entire for His Kingdom. He is not talking about our literal hair on our head. He is using it in an analogous form that you will not lose your salvation. All that you gained in this life will be preserved. He is talking about your character, and the right and proper attitudes. Those things will be saved and kept. You will not lose any of those things. Because, He says, that we are far more important to Him than any lock of hair, or more than a sparrow.

We may die, but we will not be lost. And that is the encouragement here. Remember what He says in Matthew 10:28?

Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

He said that if you have the right fear, the fear of God rather than the fear of man, if you are compliant to what God wants, if you have the right attitude, and are willing to be used, then God will use you. And that will give you, in a way, it will not pay for it, but it will guarantee that He will preserve your soul, as it were—that He will give you entrance into the Kingdom of God.

And then He says that the key (verse 19) is patience. This is patient endurance or perseverance. By this we will attain to eternal life. This is not just for times where we are brought before kings, but rather this is a general principle. It really helps when we are brought before kings, but in any situation, and any of the trials of life, if we have patient endurance, we will attain eternal life. In other words, through patient endurance, we can keep our spirit in control for eternal life. That is what that word "possess" implies—to keep something in control. When you possess something, you are in control of it, are you not? It is yours to do with as you will, right? So if you have patience, you can keep control of your spirit.

This patient endurance is very similar to the calm confidence that Samson displayed as he waited for God to act. It was the exact opposite of Elijah's despair, where he is terrified and running for his life.

In these situations, we take a deep breath, we remember how powerful God is who is in control, and we wait patiently on God for His inspiration to act or speak.

If we would go through the example of Jesus, or Stephen, or Paul in the various places where they had to stand alone, you will notice that it is indeed what they did. Jesus, especially, answered not a word. He had a greater work to do. His deliverance was to be the Deliverer of all men for all sin for all time. And, He was the Lamb who went to the slaughter, who opened not His mouth.

Stephen was very similar. When they came at him, gnashing their teeth, he stood there and said, "I see Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of the Father," which made them more angry, that he was granted this revelation. But then he said, "Father, do not charge this to their account." And then he died.

And Paul, when he stood before Festus, and Felix, and later before Nero (which we do not have the account of), he stood and argued patiently. We do not get any indication that he raised his voice, or made any accusations at all. He just presented what God gave him to present to these men. And one of them said, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian!" Hold that in mind.

I am glad we sang a portion of this today in our hymn titled, "Wait, and Hope, and Look for God." Here is some advice from a fellow who had to stand alone a time or two, the prophet and king, David.

Psalm 37:7-11 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Psalm 37:32-33 The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

Psalm 37:39-40 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.

So there you have it. This was the same man who stood alone before Goliath's defiance, and slew him with a pebble. This was the same man who stood before Saul's rage—maniacal, crazy rage—who nearly got a spear or two in his chest. Yet, he stood. And then when he had a chance to retaliate, he would not lift his hand against God's anointed, but rather apologized for even cutting off the hem of his garment.

God delivered him out of all those troubles. He will do the same for us, certainly. He will certainly deliver us into His Kingdom. As Jesus said, He may not necessarily save our lives, but He will save us for the Kingdom, and deliver us into that.

But audiences before kings, and battles against enemy warriors, are very rare events, are they not? Even for us, I hope that they are rare.

Most of our opportunities to witness for God, to stand alone for God, happen in our mundane, everyday lives. They are those interviews for a new job, in which we have to stand for the truth, and ask politely for the Sabbath off. Or maybe, it is at a dinner party where we must decline the offer of the shrimp or pork. Or maybe, it is standing before a local judge when called for jury duty, and explaining to them why you will not serve. Or perhaps, it is in a discussion across the dinner table (hopefully not an argument) with an unbelieving relative. All these, and others like them, are the times when we stand alone, and have to witness before God.

How do we react in those situations? Are we like Elijah? Afraid and despondent, wanting to run away, and hide, and say, "God can't save me out of this terrible situation, that I have to tell my boss I can't work on Saturday"?

Or, are we like Samson—calm, faithful, patient, waiting and looking for an opportunity to act for God, and to say the right things?

There are some instructions found in the letters from Paul to Timothy that I would like to go over. Turn to I Timothy 6. These are instructions to a minister who is thought to be somewhat timid. He certainly was not the forceful personality like Paul, who would be willing to take on whole churches, and tell them where they were wrong up and down.

Timothy is thought to be a more timid soul, who was not the jump in and start swinging type. He had to be sort of pushed along, you might say. As Timothy is going to be facing opposition within the church at some time or another, Paul says,

I Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Okay, that is one side of things. In II Timothy 2, Paul says,

II Timothy 2:20-26 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Like I said, this is practical instruction on how we are to approach situations where we are called upon to stand up for God—standing alone at times—in our everyday life.

In these two places, Paul is showing the difference between an emotionally immature person, who thinks he knows the truth, and a spiritually mature Christian who does know the truth, and how they handle situations.

Paul says in I Timothy 6 that emotionally immature people are all about arguments, and competition, wanting to ram things down your throat. He is in it to win, to gain something. But, Paul says to withdraw from such, and get away from them; do not have anything to do with them. We do not want to emulate such childishness, such worldliness—this is not the way to go.

In II Timothy 2, Paul gives the other side of the matter. He gives us a list of things to do, some of which we can do now, while others we put to work only when we get into a sticky situation.

FIVE THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU ARE IN A STICKY SITUATION

1. Cleanse yourself of dishonor.

This is something we do beforehand, actually. We get rid of sin, worldliness, bad attitudes, and impure motives, and all other bad things so that we can become a vessel of honor. We have to be of good character. Once we do this, we are set apart. And then he says that we are useful at this point for Christ, whatever the work is that He might want us to do.

While we are still dishonorable, full of sin, and all these bad attitudes, Christ cannot use us. But, if we clean ourselves up with His help, then we become much more useful to Him.

2. Work on our relationships with the brethren.

That is what Paul is saying there. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. These are the people we are on the same path with! So then, we must make sure, and make great effort to live in harmony with those who agree with us! How are we to confound those who oppose us if we cannot get along with those who agree with us? What kind of witness is that going to be?

If you were going to propound to somebody the way of the Lord, but our own lives show that we cannot put it into practice because we are 'duking' it out over here with one of our own brethren— This is also something that really should be done before you get into a sticky situation.

3. Do your best to avoid such confrontations and disputes.

Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes knowing that they generate strife, he says. As much as is possible, try not to get into those situations. Avoid it like the plague, if you can. Sometimes they are unavoidable. Sometimes they just happen. But we should look for ways to circumvent them if we can. We do not do this out of fear. We do not do this because we do not think that we cannot handle it. We do this, Paul says, because of what they produce. They produce hurt feelings, offense, strife, and if not controlled, it could lead to violence. They certainly will produce a separation.

Paul told the people in I Corinthians 6 that they should let themselves be defrauded just to avoid the dispute. The context was a lawsuit between brethren in public court.

Instead of being like the other people who are all about winning and competition, Paul tells us, "You must be willing to lose, suffer hurt, inconvenience, or embarrassment, or whatever it may come to, so you can produce the right result, which is peace. "Pray that you will live peacefully with all men," Paul says in another place.

Notice these first three points. They are things we must have accomplished before we get into these situations, before we have to stand alone against the enemy. Making a successful witness for God takes a lot of preparation, and time. These are all things that we need to be doing all along our Christian life anyway for preparation for such a time, should God call upon us to do it.

And if God does not do it—wonderful! We have gained all this character and have not had to prove it in the fire. But on the other hand, God does not often prepare people for things that He does not use them for later on.

These first three things are things we do before the situation even arises. These are the things we should be doing now. So there you go, there is your assignment!

4. We must make use of our Christian virtues within the situation to create the environment and opportunity for God to grant repentance.

We cannot grant repentance. We cannot call a person. But what we can do is create an environment and opportunity for God to work. James 3:18 says that "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." And Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:9 that "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

When we are in the situation, the atmosphere we create through our Christian living, and our own attitudes, toward God, and toward the other person, can make all the difference in the world regarding the outcome. What more could you do? God says that He is going to put the words into our mouths. God is the One who is going to fill us with the Spirit, and we will do what He wants at that point. But, what can we do? We can be calm. We can be peaceful. We can be trying to ratchet the situation down. We could be applying love to the other person.

These are hard things to do, because, if this person is opposing you, you would want to go up to him and punch him out. But, if we can produce an atmosphere in which God can work through our own show of love and faith, then God can act through us if He wants, or with the other person. And according to Paul, he says, "If we need to, we can correct those who are in opposition, if God will perhaps grant them repentance so that they more know the truth, that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

The best that we can do is allow God to use us by making an environment in which He can act.

5. Watch in awe as God works!

Let us conclude in Isaiah 41.

Isaiah 41:10-14 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish. You shall seek them and not find them—those who contend with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing. For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'fear not, I will help you.' Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you," says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

This is a promise that we can count on when we have to stand alone.