

Confident in Christ

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[0 : 00] In the village of Siem Reap in Cambodia, Haim, a Christian teacher, knew that the youthful black clad Khmer Rouge soldiers, now heading across the field, were coming this time for him.

! Haim was determined that when his turn came he would die with dignity and without complaint. Since liberation on April 17th 1975, what Cambodian had not considered this day.

Haim's entire family were rounded up that afternoon. The government called them the old dandruff, bad blood, enemies of the Glorious Revolution, CIA agents.

But here's what they really were, Christians, who sought to be faithful to the power higher than the government, the power of God. The family spent a sleepless night, comforting one another and praying for each other, as they lay bound together in the dewy grass beneath a stand of friendly trees.

Next morning the teenage soldiers returned and led them from their Gethsemane to their place of execution, to the nearby veils, some lap, the killing fields.

[1 : 08] The family was ordered to dig a large grave for themselves. Then, consenting to Haim's request for a moment to prepare themselves for death, father, mother and children linked hands together, knelt and prayed at the gaping pit.

And then, with loud cries, Haim began to exhort both Khmer Rouge and all those looking on from afar to repent and believe the gospel. Then, in panic, one of Haim's youngest sons leapt to his feet, bolted into the surrounding bush and disappeared.

Haim jumped up, and with amazing coolness and authority prevailed upon the Khmer Rouge not to pursue the lad, but allow him to call the boy back. The knots of onlookers peering around trees, the Khmer Rouge and the stunned family still kneeling at the graveside, looked on in awe as Haim began calling his son, pleading with him to return and die together with his family.

What comparison, my son, he called out, stealing a few more days of life in the wilderness, a fugitive, wretched and alone, to join in your family here momentarily around this grave, but soon around the throne of God, free forever in paradise.

After a few minutes, the bushes parted and the lad weeping walked slowly back to his place with the kneeling family. Now we are ready to go, Haim told the Khmer Rouge.

[2 : 34] Few of those watching doubted that as each of these Christians' bodies toppled silently into the grave, that the families had dug for themselves, that their souls would soar heavenward to a place prepared by their Lord.

One of the moving and compelling things about that story, and I've thought of it a number of times over my life, is that the whole family was murdered.

The father called his son back to join the rest of the family, standing at the edge of their own mass grave. Why not let him run away? Why not let him live to fight for another day?

Maybe he would be caught and quickly caught and tortured and killed. Who knows? But Haim's confidence in Christ and his courage to embrace that fateful day and to entrust himself and his family to the love of Christ, from which he knew nothing could separate him, is both inspiring and challenging.

I don't know if I could have done that. Do I have the same confidence in Christ that Haim and those dear saints in Cambodia had?

[3 : 49] Our scripture text today is from 2 Timothy 1, verse 12, where Paul says, I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard that which I have entrusted to him for that day.

Now, 2 Timothy is called Paul's last will and testament. His death is near. 2 Timothy 4, 6 tells us that. It's his second imprisonment in Rome. A couple of years earlier in AD 64, Nero had ordered the torching of Rome and it had burned furiously for six nights and days.

And Tacitus, the Roman historian wrote that. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order by Nero.

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populace.

Now, Paul was one of the victims of this second wave of persecution. He was incarcerated into Rome, into a house arrest in 1859, and then he'd got away, he was set free and he was able to go, we think probably to Spain, and to keep in touch with the churches.

[5 : 14] And that was when he wrote 1 Timothy. But now he's writing to Timothy while he's languishing in a prison which is much more hostile than the house arrest he'd previously had.

Probably with no sanitation, perhaps with very little light, and no prospect of relief at all except by death. He's still able to write. But everybody pretty much has deserted him apart from two of his most loyal followers, Onesiphorus and Dr. Luke himself.

And although people had deserted him, Paul said, well, may it not be counted against them. There was a cowardly ingratitude on the part of those who deserted him and he was disappointed by that.

But he did not want the Lord to forsake them, as he knew the Lord had not forsaken him. And so the Lord who had nurtured the apostle and looked after him was now encouraging him to write a letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, to encourage Timothy to be strong in the Lord, to take courage in the face of persecution.

And although he knew that Timothy was a great preacher and a very godly man, and he knew that Timothy had been called and the hands had been laid on him to preach the word in season and out of season, Timothy struggled with boldness.

[6 : 38] And Paul had to say to him in chapter one in verse six, God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power. That's Junamis dynamite of love.

That is Agape. That is God's unconditional undeserved favor and discipline. Sofronismos. It means a strong mind, a wise mind or self-control, because it's not just what you think, it's how you apply that to your life that keeps you from losing a sense of perspective and balance.

You can understand why Timothy was afraid. His beloved Paul was in prison. The church at Ephesus that he pastored had fallen more and more into heresy and into factionalism.

The great apostle was about to die and he feared that. And so he feared that the whole movement would collapse around Paul's death. And so he wanted to be clear about what he should now do.

And Paul wrote to him and said, what you should do, Timothy, is preach the gospel and preach it with boldness and with power. Don't be afraid. And he said, don't be ashamed.

[7 : 57] Now, there was all kinds of reasons to be ashamed. As a Christian, you were stigmatized. You heard Tacitus call Christians people who were guilty of abominations, hated by the populace.

And that's because they wouldn't get involved in emperor worship or in politics. And they were viewed as rather secretive. And yet they were good. But they were family orientated.

They looked after one another. They cared for one another. And in many places they were persecuted. So they suffered. And there was a sense of shame and stigma that came with suffering.

Paul said, don't be ashamed, Timothy. Why not? Because you have the gospel. And the gospel offers great hope of life beyond this world.

We have come to believe, he says in verses 8 to 10 of chapter 1, in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[9 : 02] That is to say, he has rendered inoperable the power of death over the believer. For believers, death is no longer a threat, no longer an enemy, no longer the end.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 and 54 to 55, when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Jesus, says the writer of the Hebrews, has brought life and immortality to light. Jesus has abolished death and rendered it powerless through his resurrection from the dead.

So from this we can learn some great lessons in faith. How can we be sure that we are confident in Christ? How can we be sure that like Paul and like Chaim, we will not give in in the face of persecution and suffering?

How can we avoid being ashamed of the gospel? Well, we need to remember that ultimately we are on the victory side. Those who mock us one day will learn that at the name of Jesus every knee, including theirs, will bow, and every tongue will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[10 : 27] And what a person thinks and believes about Jesus is the crucial determiner of where they will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. We are going to spend eternity in heaven with Jesus.

So we ought not to be ashamed. We will live forever. We have eternal life even now. And we have passed from death to life. We need not be ashamed.

Rather, we need to be confident as Paul was in Christ. So what can we learn about confidence in Christ? Three things. We should be confident in Christ because we know him.

Paul says, I know whom I have believed. And that word know means to have certain knowing facts. It's the word Jesus uses when he says in Matthew 6, verse 8, your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

It's a perfect knowledge. He knows everything. And we know Jesus when we have believed. Jesus knew what was in men. He was certain. He had clear insight.

[11 : 29] He knew from the beginning who they were and who did not believe and who it was that would betray him. There was no uncertainty about that. So the knowledge of Christ that Paul speaks of having is a certain knowledge.

We have come to know Jesus. I know whom I have believed. We have come to have faith in him and believe in him. And we are confident, therefore, in him.

So confidence in Christ is because we know him. Confidence in Christ is also because he is able. Paul says, I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able.

That is the Greek word junatos. He has power enough to guard what I have entrusted to him. The word guard, of course, is a military term.

Paul was familiar with the Roman guards that kept him in prison. They were ensuring that he who had been entrusted to their care would be looked after, even though their care was rough and unwelcoming.

[12:30] So to guard something is to keep it safe. And that which we have committed to Jesus is being kept safe by him because he is able.

Just like Chaim, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword.

For it is written, for your sake we have been put to death all day long. We are considered the sheep to be slaughtered. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have absolute security in God because God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is able to save us and to keep us. And then thirdly, we have confidence in Christ because we know him, because he is able, but because I can trust him.

[13:38] Paul says, I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. And what is it that you have entrusted to him? Not a creed or a theological system.

Not your money. Not even your health. Not even your wellbeing. You have entrusted to him your soul. And he will look after your soul.

You have been given a trust, which is the Gospel. And Paul talks about my Gospel that he preached. He understood that he was a joint partaker with that Gospel. And he knew that nothing could stop that Gospel going out.

Not a Nero, not a Chairman Mao, not a Joseph Stalin. Nothing could stop the Gospel from being successful and bringing souls to Christ. And he entrusted Christ with his soul.

And he knew that nothing could separate us from Jesus. If we trust in Jesus, if we hope in him, if we believe in him, we will be saved, the Scripture says.

[14:38] If we put our trust in him, nothing can stop us from attaining heaven. I give them eternal life, says Jesus, and they shall never perish. And no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hands. Not the demons in hell. Not Satan himself.

We trust our lives to Jesus. And all will be well. If God holds the key of all unknown, says Joseph Parker, I am glad.

If others' hands should hold the key, or if he trusted it to me, I might be sad. I cannot read his future plans, but this I know. I have the smiling of his face, and all the refuge of his grace while here below.

Enough. This covers all my need, and so I rest. For what I cannot, he can see. And in his care, I saved, shall be forever blessed.

[15:37] May the Lord bless to us his words. I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.