

As we traveled through the world to spread the gospel, we regularly encountered strict opposition from the local councils, rulers, and authorities. On Christ's account some of us stood before governors and kings, and many of us were beaten and flogged in the very halls of "justice" and even in religious centers (synagogues)¹.

Jesus warned us of the aggressive and predatory nature of our adversaries, and advised us to be shrewd in our dealings and actions but in a manner that reflected the Goodness of God. But most of us were not trained to speak in such situations – especially in front of a large crowd. By God's providence the Holy Spirit came to re-enforce the things that we had learned while our Great Teacher was physically with us². This was indeed a tremendous comfort as we scattered throughout the land preaching the good news.

We were promised that the Spirit would give us the right words to speak, at the right time. This was evidenced by the way Peter addressed the crowd on the Day of Pentecost³. Paul trained at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel⁴, and once had to battle Tertullus⁵, who was a highly-trained speaker. But Paul⁶, who preached "with all boldness and without hindrance⁷", considered his speaking "contemptible⁸" and admitted to being untrained in speech (but not in knowledge)⁹.

Some of the main characters in the Scriptures had apparent issues with being a spokesman for God. Moses claimed to not be eloquent, and to be slow of speech and tongue¹⁰ and was given his brother Aaron as his spokesman¹¹. Isaiah claimed to have unclean lips – maybe he had a similar problem. And Jonah ran away, likely because he knew what to say but did not want to say it – it turns out he was the most effective in the end¹².

Confronting our enemies was assumed to be the most difficult demand in this regard, but I found that it was also very difficult at times to find the right words for those who were very close to me – especially family members. I knew that at times I was failing to spread my faith to others, even though I tried to inspire and encourage them.

The more you care about someone, the more the burden seemed to weigh on you to be careful. Many people that I was close to seemed to be at a "tipping" point, where the slightest push could send them one way or the other. I wanted to keep the door open, and was sometimes afraid that I would be shut out. As long as the door was open, then there would be opportunities to discuss God and His love.

So I tried to be a good example, following the Way of Christ, and helping and encouraging¹³ people along the way. Brother Paul talked about becoming all things to all people in order to save them¹⁴, but it is difficult to know just how to effectively balance this act. As Solomon wrote, there is a time to speak and a time to be silent¹⁵. My hope was to be able to win over others without words if necessary¹⁶, and with the evidence of a life that they could see followed the Way¹⁷.

1. Matthew 10:16-20, Mark 13:9-11, Luke 12:11-12

2. John 14:25-26

3. Acts 2:14-41
4. Acts 22:3
5. Acts 24:1
6. notes from Stephen H. Webb
7. Acts 28:31
8. 2 Corinthians 10:10
9. 2 Corinthians 11:6
10. Exodus 4:10
11. Exodus 4:10 and 6:12
12. see the book of Jonah
13. Hebrews 10:24-25
14. 1 Corinthians 9:21-23
15. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b
16. "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." St. Francis of Assisi.
17. 1 Peter 3:1-2

© Copyright 2018, Heard Lowry