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# REDEEMED AND SAYING SO PART III

February 12, 2012

## LET THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD... \_\_\_\_\_ !!!

We're going to follow this theme for the next couple weeks, encouraging you to be brave, or Saying So, with your Christian faith.

*BRAVERY: a readiness to do the right thing even if it hurts*

Bravery should be a constant. It has to always be working behind the scenes and the church is here to help believers stay brave and live brave.

## A NEEDED WORD ABOUT COMMUNITY AT THE WATERS

I'm getting more and more convinced that we can't do life as believers in Christ without church. Some people are so dumb...they say things like...the deer stand is my church, the fishing pond is my church, my family is my church. Well jeez, why stop there? Why not go ahead and reinvent all of God's other ideas, too? How about marriage being between a man and bacon? Why not add a few commandments to the top ten...or better yet, take a few away?

Church is incredibly important for you...BUT IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF THESE SERMONS! If you aren't sharing your life with people in church, and letting them share theirs with you, then you are not part of one of God's best ideas he ever came up with. Some of you believe that church should just be an experience that you attend, receive from it, give to it financially, pray while you're there a little, and as soon as the service is over you get the heck outta Dodge.

I know why you do this, too. I've thought the same thing. You don't want to connect with anyone up at the church because they are all a risk to your life. They all stand the chance of betraying you, hurting you, lying to you, stealing from you. And so you, because you love God and all, agree to come attend the church, but you'll never really get involved in it because you either...Don't want it to hurt you or you don't want to hurt it.

This reminds me of someone that is shy. Remember, being shy is just rejecting other people before they can reject you. And we always do this because we're prideful. Here's the truth – We need our pride cut out of our lives...out of our hearts. You think you're smart because you come up with cute little mantras like..."If I keep everyone at an arm's distance away from me, no one can hurt me" or "If I stay on the outside fringe of everything then I won't be distracted by the real dirt that goes on in a church"

Let me ask you something if you're thinking these thoughts... HOW'S THAT CAVE YOU'RE LIVING IN WORKING OUT FOR YOU? How's your little life of insulating yourself from others helping you learn to serve others and befriend them? If you're not careful you'll paint yourself in a corner in which not only with the preacher have to lie at your funeral, but there won't be anybody there but you and him, and

maybe a few others who are there out of obligation. These toxic walls of separation are not what God had in mind when he invented the church

***Acts 2:44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.***

***Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.***

***Philippians 2:4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.***

***Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those that rejoice and mourn with those that mourn.***

How in the world do you do that if you don't share your life with your church? Here's my fear...We are all here in the place every Sunday, we come do this thing together, we are here for a few minutes and when it's over, we go out to the parking lot, where our real selves are waiting for us in our cars. My fear is that we aren't honest when we're together (I get why we aren't many times...but it doesn't make it healthy).

Ever been at an event, and someone there asks you for a ride home...and you immediately think about the status of your car? You say, "Sure...I need to go out to my car for just a minute first...maybe a few minutes...see you in a couple hours". We don't like the idea of someone seeing us in our true state of life. Here's the truth...if we're going to get this thing right, then we have to be honest like the first church was. We need to just drive our cars right into this auditorium, open up the car doors, and let the dirt pile on up.

That will do two things... it will help you actually make true friendships that you need and it will help you get rid of this trash...accountability always does this. It will also increase your bravery...your Say So attitude

## BRAVERY ALL THE TIME

*"Don't be afraid of your fears. They're not there to scare you. They're there to let you know that something is worth it." — C. Joybell*

Each opportunity for bravery is usually accompanied by the probability of pain.

***PSALM 107:2 "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."***

This "say so" spirit is one that will be demanded of you at some point in your faith journey. A person who is brave is ready to do the right thing even if it hurts.

***Psalm 15:4 "...who keeps his oath even when it hurts..."***

It's not an off and on thing, it's a constant thing. One of my favorite stories of bravery is the story of Stephen. The Disciples of Jesus needed to make a plan to take care of people's needs in the first century

church. In order to help people with their daily needs, they chose Deacons (the name Deacon means “someone who run errands for others”). This job description wasn’t given to just anyone... the biblical qualifications were spelled out by the disciples.

***Acts 6:3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.***

One of the men they chose was Stephen...according to this chapter Stephen was full of it. Acts 6:3, 5, 8. Stephen was full of “faith, wisdom, grace, power, and the Holy Spirit”. He was chosen because of this full-of-it lifestyle...He lived this way all the time. Just like Peter from last week, Stephen was given a Say So moment, but Stephen took full advantage of this moment like few in history have ever done...his story will forever be an inspiration to me.

Last week we watched how Peter displayed a false form of bravery at the wrong place and time. Now we see Stephen displaying a true form of bravery at the perfect time.

## STEPHEN’S STORY

Stephen is immediately attacked by the religious machine accusing him of preaching the gospel of Jesus instead of the continuation of the sacrificial rituals of the Jewish system. In other words, the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God ... and anyone who didn’t also do that was considered the enemy.

The accusations against Stephen were strong and Stephen knew that if he was convicted in their little kangaroo court he would be treated severely...potentially just like they had just treated Jesus. But Stephen knew Psalm 107:2 by heart...and this was his Say So moment. After the religious leaders listed out the charges against Stephen, they asked him a question. Remember last week when Peter was asked a question... Do you know this man? Here comes one for Stephen.

***ACTS 7:1 The high priest asked him, “Are these charges true?”***

All Stephen had to do at this point was say no, instead he said so... For the rest of the chapter, he took the Jews and the Jewish on a little tour of their entire Jewish history, from Genesis all the way through the prophets in the end of the Old Testament. He illustrates how these prophets were pointing the way to Jesus. He shows how the Jews rejected these prophets and then he accuses them of killing the very Messiah – Jesus - that the prophets had been talking about for all this time.

***ACTS 7:51 “You stiff necked people. Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors. You always resist the Holy Spirit!”***

“Uncircumcised hearts and ears”... circumcision was a sign of obedience among the Jews. They were very proud to be a circumcised people. To them it was a sign of their loyalty to God...it turned out to be

a sign that they believed that they were better. Stephen turned this around on them and said their hearts weren't circumcised, and neither were their ears.

A circumcised heart means that the pride has been cut out from that heart. Circumcised ears means that they become unclogged of the sounds of their own thoughts and ideas that they are actually open minded to the things of God and the truths of Jesus Christ. What is Stephen doing? He is taking a massive risk going against the popular culture and norms of his day to introduce Jesus into the culture.

He continued... he goes on to say that these current religious leaders rejected Jesus just like their ancestors rejected God's prophets and in their rejection of Christ they decided to kill him. He concludes this speech against them by calling them disobedient to God's law... BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD'S LAW WAS THE VERY THING THESE RELIGIOUS LEADERS PRIDED THEMSELVES ON THE MOST...AND STEPHEN JUST CALLED THEM ALL FRAUDS. The stage is set for the very first Christian martyr.

*Acts 7:54-60* <sup>54</sup>When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup>But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup>"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." <sup>57</sup>At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup>dragged him out of the city and began to stone him...<sup>59</sup>While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup>Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep."

## STEPHEN'S "SAY SO"

Stephen's bravery gave us a glimpse into an amazing vision, and an incredible side of Jesus. Recently I taught you about the significance of Jesus being seated at the right hand of God. That meant the executive authoritative branch of the One in charge. Jesus served as God the Father's authoritative branch on Earth.

There's another thing about our High Priest, sitting...normal Jewish Priests never sat down. There were no chairs in the Temple sacrificial areas. In a sense, the priest's job was never done. So when the Bible says that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, it presents Jesus as a High Priest whose job is finished, He is the final sacrifice...and so he sits. But here, through Stephen's eyes, we see a different picture of Jesus in Heaven.

*Acts 7:55* "...Stephen...looked up into heaven and saw...Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

Question...why was Jesus "standing" - this is the only place in the Bible where this phrase is used. Here's what I see in this story, I see Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the victorious Savior of the Earth, the High Priest who has finished his work, and deserves to be seated...I see Him standing at attention to welcome to Heaven the very first Christian martyr...the very first Christian to be put to death because of his faith in Jesus. I think we have a lot in common with Stephen.

## STEPHEN AND US

The meaning of Stephen's name... GREEK: Stephanos – Crowned One

Romans 8 declares us Heirs to the King. That makes each Christian a Prince or Princess in the Kingdom of God. You are all Stephanos...and you will all be given the opportunity to Say So.

Stephen's crowning achievement was Saying So in the midst of Saying No. I think his crown helped him in his boldness...wouldn't it help you? Isn't it easier to stand up for what is right when everyone around you is? Or when a really big dude is backing you up? How about letting your crown remind you of a really big dude, the Dude of Dudes, having your back. That's what your crown can do for you.

Jesus stood for Stephen...and He's standing for you. If you're a Christian, use your crown and Say So in your daily life. Come to church and connect with people here, listen to God's kinds of music, speak in ways that honor God and don't be afraid to stand out a little.

Ask God to give you the same kind of vision that he gave Stephen and while you're at it, open your car door a little...