



The Incredible Journey

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Somebody once asked the great preacher Charles Spurgeon if he would be ready to die for his faith. “Pastor Spurgeon,” he asked, “if you actually had to lay down your life for the things you believe, do you think you could do it?”

“Absolutely not”, he said.

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Well, the answer was a little surprising, so he asked Spurgeon to explain himself.

“Well, it’s like this,” he said. “If you’re asking if I have the courage to die for my faith right now, and I’m honest, I’d have to tell you no. The thought of dying just doesn’t appeal to me. But if that moment was to come, I believe that God would give me the courage to do it.”

I’ve often wondered myself if I’d have what it takes to be a martyr – to die for my faith – and then one day, digging through the prophecies of the Bible, I found a key that gives hope to a faltering heart; a key so powerful that it gives me unshakable confidence that no matter what comes my way, I can face it with a smile and a song in my heart.

Have you ever worked really hard for something – I mean really slaved over it

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for years – just to have someone else come along and take it away? Well, then, maybe you can identify with the fears and frustrations of an ancient king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. As a young man, he came to power in the Babylonian kingdom, and through a lot of hard work, he grew it into the greatest empire the world had ever seen. It was so great that it literally became a monument to human achievement, and the ancient historian, Herodotus, tells us that he was awestruck by what he saw in the ancient city of Babylon:

Babylon, (he said), lies in a wide plain, a vast city in the form of a square with sides nearly fourteen miles long and a circuit of some fifty-six miles, and in addition to its enormous size it surpasses

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*in splendour any city of the known world.*¹

It would have come as no surprise to Herodotus to discover that we still use the word “Babylon” to describe a state of opulence and absolute self-indulgence.

Nebuchadnezzar had built the greatest kingdom the world had ever seen, and in his heart, he knew it. His empire was a monument to his own greatness, a guarantee that neither history nor geography would ever forget who he was or what he had accomplished.

But then came that fateful night when God spoke to him in a dream and showed him a statue made of different metals. It represented the succession of world empires to come, and that night,

¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, book 1, paragraph 178.

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he discovered that Babylon would not stand forever. It would be dismantled by a power that not even the greatest king in history could withstand. “Nebuchadnezzar”, said Daniel the prophet, “you may be the head of gold on the statue; you may rule the most fabulous kingdom that has ever existed –but one day, another kingdom – in fact, an inferior one – will take your place.”

God had chosen to reveal the world’s future to a pagan king. In the quiet recesses of the darkest part of the night, He flooded the king’s mind with a vivid picture of the future that continues to stump the toughest critics of the Bible to this day. Hundreds of years in advance, Nebuchadnezzar saw the rise and fall of world empires. He was carried through the corridors of time from his own day to the consummation of world history and

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the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The message he got that night was clear: God has a definite purpose in history that cannot be defeated – not even by the most capable people with the most ambitious plans.

But instead of drawing comfort from the fact that God is in control of human history, Nebuchadnezzar found the dream disturbing, because everything he had worked for was destined to crumble. So, in the third chapter of Daniel, just one chapter after the prophetic dream, we find Nebuchadnezzar building a literal statue in defiance of God's prediction. Instead of four different metals plus clay, his statue was made of gold from head to toe – and the implication was clear – his name and his kingdom would never fail, no matter what God said. He was telling himself that God was wrong. Let's open

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the pages of sacred history and read about it:

Daniel 3:1 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits (which is about 27.3 metres), and the breadth thereof six cubits (or about 2.72 metres): he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.*

It was a public declaration that nobody could stop his greatness. He was shaking his fist at the God of heaven, trying to reassure himself that maybe God was wrong.

What's really interesting about this statue is that it was not the first such monument to be built on the plains of Babylon. In the eleventh chapter of Genesis, there's a story about another shrine to man's greatness built in defiance of God:

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Genesis 11:4 *And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

It was the tower of Babel, built on the plains of Shinar, a God-defying monument to the human race. And at the same time, they built a city, which became the city of Babylon, a lasting symbol of religious confusion and rebellion against God. It was the birthplace of false worship, the cradle of self-serving pagan religions and astrology. Its influence was so profound that the effects are still with us to this day.

But in Daniel chapter 3, the monument to self-sufficiency is not a tower - it's a giant golden statue, and I sometimes wonder if Nebuchadnezzar didn't build it in exactly

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the same place as the tower of Babel. Now of course, I don't know that for sure, but even if it wasn't built in exactly the same place, it was certainly built with exactly the same spirit – something that becomes really obvious when you look at who was invited to the dedication ceremony. Let's read about it:

Daniel 3:2 *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.*

Just like the tower of Babel, this statue was an attempt to unite the whole world in the spirit of Babylon. All the government officials from across the kingdom were required to show up -

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sending a clear signal to the empire that the kingdom was as strong as ever. And once they were assembled, they were required to participate in a brand-new one-world religion. Let's read about it:

Daniel 3:4 *Then an herald cried aloud: To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up.*

Now, did you hear those last two words, where it says the king “set up” the image? In the original language, the word for “set up” is “haqim,” and it’s exactly the same word God uses in Daniel chapter 2 to describe the kingdom that He will “set up” at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And (as Bible

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scholar Jaques Doukan points out) this word “haqim” is used eight times to describe the setting up of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue. It’s almost as if the king is building his statue as a direct challenge to Jesus Christ, publicly denying that God will ever defeat Babylon or set up a kingdom of His own.

In a desperate attempt to stop what God said would happen, Nebuchadnezzar establishes a universal world religion – an alternative to the truth where people are required to worship an image instead of God. It’s a religion based on force instead of love; a system that forces people to their knees in front of falsehood instead of gently wooing them into the truth.

But you’ll notice that Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t come up with something entirely original. His new religion is loosely

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based on something true. He borrows from God to build his lie, taking the prophetic statue in Daniel chapter 2, and twisting it just enough to make it mean something entirely different. And that is still the outstanding characteristic of every false religion in the world today. They're all loosely based on truth, which is why you can find a semblance of truth in almost any religion.

You see, the devil knows that he's not likely to get a bunch of committed Christians to blatantly disobey the word of God, so what he does is cunningly twist the Christian religion just enough to rob it of the depth and richness God intended it to have. The most dangerous deception in the world is not an outright lie; it's the mingling of truth with lies so that falsehood becomes more palatable.

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There are a number of obvious examples of this in the Bible. Take, for example, the story of Cain and Abel. In Genesis chapter 4, both brothers offered a sacrifice to God, but God accepted one and rejected the other. Now as a kid, that used to really bother me, but then I came across a key in Hebrews chapter 11 that explains why it happened. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, and of course, the clear implication is that Cain did not offer his sacrifice by faith. And still, both of them offered sacrifices.

Here's what actually happened. In the Bible, sacrificial lambs were a powerful symbol pointing to a coming Redeemer who would die for the sins of the world. Repentant sinners would lay their hands on a lamb, confess their sins over it, and then take the lamb's life. It was a

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forward-looking reminder of what Jesus would do for them one day at the cross of Calvary. By faith, the sinner demonstrated his belief that the coming Lamb of God was his substitute - and that's why Abel offered a lamb.

But his brother Cain sacrificed fruits and vegetables instead, which – while they were still a sacrifice - were not the symbols that God had asked for. They were not a living, breathing, spotless substitute for the sinner. And because of that, God rejected Cain's offering.

Now I'm sure that Cain picked very nice vegetables, and I'm sure he offered lots of them – but the bottom line was that God didn't ask for vegetables. He asked for a lamb, but Cain was determined to do things his own way. He took a clear requirement of God and twisted it slightly, stripping it of the meaning that

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God intended it to have. And the result was a faithless counterfeit that looked almost like the real thing. It was manmade religion that paid lip service to God but wasn't based on real, living faith in Christ.

And that's the hallmark of any cult or false religion. The most dangerous deception is the one that looks almost like the truth, weaving a lethal blend of superstition and falsehood through the fabric of reality. You're more likely to drink cyanide if it's mixed into a tall, cool glass of lemonade, than if it's just sitting around in a bottle marked "poison" - and that's why the language cults use sounds just like the language you might hear from a Christian pulpit. It sounds so much like the truth that a lot of people fall for it.

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And so, bit by bit, the devil planted an idea in Nebuchadnezzar's mind "Maybe you could take the statue and twist it just enough to suit your own purposes. After all, why should only the head represent the kingdom of Babylon? Why not the whole body? Is there really any evidence to suggest that the kingdom is about to collapse, and isn't Babylon the greatest kingdom the world has ever seen?"

The very fact that Nebuchadnezzar had enough gold to build a statue 27.3 metres high – and never even miss it – was pretty strong evidence that the kingdom of Babylon was a long way from falling.

So, the story of Daniel chapter 3 is a story where God's truth is mixed with human ambition and pride. It's a manmade monument built on top of the

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Word of God; a clear signal to heaven that the human race has no intention of believing what the Creator says. And to make matters even worse, Nebuchadnezzar forces people to bow down and worship the image on the threat of death. Verse 6 says:

Daniel 3:6 *And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.*

Now I want you to notice the key components of this story, because it's one of the golden keys that unlocks the meaning of some of the toughest passages in Bible prophecy. First of all, the king establishes a false religion based on idol worship. Then he sends out a universal decree to all of the political leaders of the empire, insisting that they come and worship the golden

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image. And if they won't comply, they will be put to death.

There's a striking parallel between this story and something that happens in the 13th chapter of the book of Revelation. In that somewhat disturbing chapter of the Bible, there are two beast powers whose main objective is to lead the world into false worship. The second beast, says the Bible, sets up an image to the first beast, and then he insists that the whole world worships the image of the beast. Just like the story of the golden statue, it's a universal decree, and the penalty for not complying is death. There are uncanny similarities. Speaking of the second beast in Revelation 13:

Revelation 13:14 *And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them*

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that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

Again, it's a universal call to false worship with the death penalty for those who won't cooperate. Buried not-so-deep in the story of the fiery furnace is a clear message to God's people living at the end of time. There is coming a moment when your faith will be tested - a moment when the world will require you, even upon pain of death, to do something that is a direct violation of God's moral law.

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, he was telling people to break the second

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commandment, which forbids the worship of images. And in the final hours of earth's history, the Bible makes it clear that God's people will once again be caught up in a religious controversy surrounding worship. They will be asked to break God's commandments – but the good news is, according to the Bible, there will be people who stubbornly cling to their faith in Jesus Christ. They refuse to accept substitutes, and they refuse to compromise. Here's what the Bible says:

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

In the face of unbelievable persecution, there will be people who refuse to compromise. Their commitment to Christ is completely unmovable.

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You see, back in Nebuchadnezzar's day, the Bible says that there were three young men who refused to bow down to a counterfeit: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They knew that nothing in this world was worth losing out on a relationship with Jesus, and they stood firm for the truth.

So, what happened to them?

Well, true to the king's word, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. "Nebuchadnezzar", they said, "we don't know if God is going to save us from your furnace, but this much we know – we will never violate our relationship with Him".

Let me ask you an important question today – where does that kind of unbending commitment come from? Where do people find the strength to

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stand for God even when they're not entirely sure they won't have to pay for it? As you search your own heart, don't you sometimes wish you had that same kind of unquestioning confidence in the word of God?

Here's what the Bible says happened. In a blind rage, with wounded pride, the king ordered the three faithful boys into a furnace so hot that it killed the men who threw them in - but to his astonishment, he discovered that there is Someone bigger than the biggest of human ambitions – Someone whose purpose in the salvation of the world will not be derailed by anybody.

As Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace, he noticed four men. "Lo", he said in Daniel 3:25, *"I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire,*

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and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

You see, the Bible says that when you face life's worst, you are never alone. When it seems as if everything is lost, you will suddenly meet your Redeemer, because Jesus isn't just out there somewhere, watching what happens to you from a distance – He's walking through the flames right next to you.

Those three young men came out of the furnace without so much as the smell of smoke on their clothes, and what God is trying to tell us is that we're going to make it, too. Not only will Christ give us the courage to stand true in the face of incredible opposition, He will also personally walk us through to the end of the whole ordeal – right up to the day when we step out of this world of heartache into an everlasting paradise

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prepared for those who stubbornly loved God.

The third chapter of Daniel is the story of a Redeemer who is looking for those who will always stand true – and I would like to suggest that you are just the person He's looking for. You may not think that you have the courage to walk into a fiery furnace, but God's promise in Daniel 3 is that you can do it. And sometimes, you may not be sure that when life's toughest moments arrive, you will always find Jesus standing there waiting for you, but the promise of God is that the moment you step into the furnace, He will be there.

And the question God asks you today is this: when all the world bows to a counterfeit, caving in to cultural pressure and unbearable temptation, wouldn't you rather have the truth?

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And when all the world stands on the plain, safe from bodily harm in their disobedience to God, wouldn't you rather be safe for an eternity with Jesus?

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He was an earnest priest who tried to reform the church a century before Martin Luther. He took a courageous stand in a time of wide-spread religious corruption. And he paid the ultimate price. John Hus is regarded as a great hero in the Czech Republic. He has served as a symbol of resistance to oppression for over 500 years.

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But Hus was also a remarkable human being. He displayed a certain quality which few of us today associate with the great martyrs of the church.

In the early 1400s, a bright young lecturer at the University of Prague discovered the writings of the English reformer, John Wycliffe. He soon became convinced that the church here in Bohemia badly needed reformation. Some of its beliefs and practices simply couldn't be reconciled with New Testament teaching.

And so, in his mid-twenties, John Hus began speaking out against forged miracles and ecclesiastical greed. He urged the people to stop looking for some physical sign of Christ's presence -- like a bleeding statue -- and to start seeking Him in His enduring Word.

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Of course, the powerful church of that time didn't take kindly to these criticisms. And soon Hus was condemned, pursued and persecuted as a heretic.

But, he stood his ground, making this bold reply to his accusers, "I trust that by God's grace I am a sincere Christian, not deviating from the faith. I would rather suffer the dire punishment of death than to put forth anything contrary to . . . the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ."

On another occasion, Hus declared, "It is better to die well than to live wickedly. One should not sin in order to avoid the punishment of death. Truth conquers all things."

The Hus monument, erected in Prague's Old Town Square, commemorates the man who spoke those courageous words. In the statue, John Hus is looking

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toward the Church of Our Lady at Tyn. He appears to glance over at its twin Gothic Spires with a look of lofty determination, as if still pleading firmly for a thorough work of reformation.

Brave martyrs like John Hus are usually memorialized in statues like the Hus monument. And when we peer into their immobile stone faces, an important question comes to mind: How could they be so sure they were right?

Reformers like Hus, almost by definition, have to go against the tide; they have to believe they are right and most of the people around them, wrong. They have to stand firm against tremendous pressure. They can't give in to religious tradition or popular opinion.

But that makes us wonder: what's the difference between a reformer and a

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fanatic? What's the difference between making a brave stand for God -- and making a stubborn stand for your own opinions? How do you cling steadfastly to the truth -- without becoming close-minded?

Sometimes, we have to admit, the followers of great reformers start to resemble statues, instead of living human beings. That is, they become as rigid and unbending as a monument of stone. The truth is settled once-and-for-all; no one can teach them anything.

Great reformers had to believe they'd discovered truths that most church people around them simply couldn't see. But fanatics also believe they are right -- and everyone else is wrong. Great martyrs were willing to die for what they believed. But so are cult leaders like David Koresh.

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Do you see our problem? It's not enough just to have strong religious opinions. We must make the right kind of stand. We must stand for the truth in a healthy way.

It's true we need an unshakable faith in order to remain steadfast in the worst of times. But we don't want that faith to become merely brittle: hard and unyielding, closed to all outside influences.

If our faith is merely brittle -- it will break.

Fortunately, John Hus himself shows us a way out of our dilemma. When we take a careful look at his ministry in Prague, we will come to understand how to stand firm -- without becoming just a statue.

It was in the Bethlehem Chapel, where John Hus was appointed rector in 1402.

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It was there that he preached the gospel to the people in their own Bohemian tongue. It was here that he boldly called for reform in the life and beliefs of fellow church members. Hus continued his ministry in the chapel, sometimes in great peril, sometimes with forced interruptions, until his death in 1415.

The reformer spoke out very boldly there against the corruption of the church. He boldly championed the one, true gospel. But you notice something else that stands out in his life and ministry. John Hus treated his enemies very graciously.

After Hus was excommunicated by Pope Alexander, he defended his Scriptural beliefs very ably in that church. But he also urged the people to pray for the pope, that God, he said, may “preserve him from evil and be graciously pleased to grant that he be the salt of the earth.”

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Hus remained gracious to the end. While awaiting death at the stake, he wrote a letter to friends, expressing deep appreciation because one man at his trial had shaken his hand. It was a gesture of friendship made, Hus wrote, “to me, a wretched, despised heretic, bound in chains and cursed by almost all.”

In his final letters, he also referred to some of his former Czech supporters who had turned into his enemies. It was they who had handed him to the inquisitors. But in his letter, Hus implored his friends, “I beseech you that you pray for them.”

As one biographer put it, “There was no bitterness in his heart, no recrimination, only love and forgiveness.”

One of the marks of fanatics is that they turn all who disagree with them into

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enemies. Anyone who does not support them 100 percent is of the devil. But John Hus knew about grace. He knew that all of us fall into error; all of us are frail. And he behaved graciously, even toward some of those who were determined to destroy him.

Fanatics cut themselves off from more and more people. Great heroes of the faith extend grace to more and more people.

At the pulpit in the Bethlehem Chapel where John Hus preached, is where he stood as he made his case firmly and unequivocally for the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is where he stood on the authority of Scripture alone.

But, in reading about the doctrinal controversies that surrounded this man, you notice something remarkable. He

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always went to great lengths to be reasonable, to remain open to argument. Hus fought great battles against the corrupt clergy of his day, but he fought very carefully.

One of the great battles was over the teachings of John Wycliffe. In Prague you were either for him or against him. He was either the new apostle of truth or the mouthpiece of Satan himself. So, of course, the authorities demanded to know which side Hus was on.

Well, Hus freely admitted his sympathies with Wycliffe. But, he was careful to explain exactly why. He took pains to distinguish between what Wycliffe really affirmed in his writings, and what people were assuming he said. Instead of adding to the slogans people were throwing at each other, John Hus tried to make the issues clearer.

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At one point, the pope imposed an interdict on all the citizens of Prague. Because Hus continued to preach in the city, all its residents were excommunicated and deprived of all spiritual ministry from the church. Now, Hus faced a tremendous dilemma. Should he leave Prague, or stay? If he left, the interdict would surely be lifted, and church services would be restored.

But, if he left, he would also be acting against his own principles. One principle he had passionately defended was this: whoever ceases to preach and abandons his post because of an unjust excommunication commits a grave sin against God's cause. Hus didn't want to abandon his flock in this time of peril.

What should he do? Hus consulted two of his assistants at Bethlehem Chapel. After much thought and prayer, the

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reformer decided to leave and spare the people of Prague the excommunication which they greatly feared.

But he also vowed to visit the chapel secretly and “strengthen Christ’s sheep” whenever he had opportunity.

Hus’ action speaks volumes about the difference between a fanatic, a rigid statue, and a true hero of the faith. Typically, when a fanatic has made a public stand on principle, he never modifies that position -- no matter how dangerous or harmful it may turn out to be in practice. He can never admit to a mistake.

But Hus was willing to compromise his publicly stated position -- for the good of others. He chose the lesser of the two evils; he chose the course of action that

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would bring less harm to the people he loved.

The remarkable thing about the reformer boldly proclaiming the gospel in this place, a man boldly challenging the church of his day, is that he remained so humble and teachable.

How did this lone priest initiate reforms that were so far ahead of his time? Listen to what Hus wrote: "From the earliest time of my studies, I have set up for myself the rule that whenever I discern a sounder opinion in any matter whatsoever, I gladly and humbly abandon the earlier one. For I know that those things I have learned are but the least in comparison with what I do not know."

What a refreshing attitude! The spiritual leaders who become fanatics, who

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become rigid statues, are certain that they know everything, they know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But John Hus, this giant in the faith, acknowledged that what he didn't know was so much greater than what he did know.

Hus remained teachable to the end. He sought the counsel of others. He continued studying the Scriptures to refine his beliefs. He considered carefully the arguments of his enemies.

We see this even after Hus had been tried and condemned by a church council in the Swiss city of Constance. This was his final declaration before his accusers: "Concerning the articles drawn from my books . . . I declare, that if any of them contain a false sense, that sense I repudiate. But fearing to offend against the truth . . . I am not willing to recant any

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of them. If it were possible that my voice could now be heard in the whole world, as at the Day of Judgement, every lie and all my sins shall be revealed, I would most gladly recant before all the world every falsehood and every error I ever have thought of saying or have said.”

Here was a man willing to die for the truth that cried out so clearly from the New Testament. And here was a man quite willing to acknowledge his weakness and sinfulness. He remained open to persuasion from the Word of God until the very end.

John Hus had to make a courageous stand against the power and authority of the church in a time of ignorance and corruption. But he remained always a teachable servant at the feet of Jesus Christ. He didn't just loudly proclaim the gospel of grace, the gospel of the cross

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of Christ. He remained awed and humbled by the Christ of Calvary.

Hus was a courageous reformer. But he never became a rigid statue. He didn't shut out everyone else's opinions. He remained gracious toward his enemies. He didn't just shout the truth louder than anyone else; he listened more carefully than anyone else. Hus was very conscious of how much he DIDN'T know. And THAT'S why he came to understand so much.

This man stands out in history as the "Teachable Martyr". His life shows us the important difference between fanatics, people with a hard, brittle faith, and real Christian heroes who possess an unshakable faith.

That unshakable faith was tested at Prague's historic Town Hall, founded

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in 1338. The building has been rebuilt and restored since then, but it was in this location that city officials struggled with the issues of Hus' reformation. They had to deal with charges of heresy. They had to deal with the threat of excommunication.

The deliberations were held in a room like this. This council chamber dates from the 15th century. The name of John Hus came up many times here and caused a lot of controversy. So did the name of John's companion in reform -- Jerome of Prague. Hus and Jerome worked together to bring the gospel to light after it had been buried under centuries of church tradition. But they were quite different in personality and background.

Hus came from a country village. Jerome belonged to a noble family. Hus

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expressed himself plainly; Jerome was brilliant, articulate -- and impulsive.

Jerome was actually a knight, as well as a philosopher and teacher. He felt quite at home among the proud coats of arms. When Hus' reforms began to draw the attention and anger of the pope, Jerome was quick to defend them. He did so very eloquently.

When persecution came, Jerome resisted bravely. He was ready for a fight. At one point, he and some companions threw a priest into the river; the man almost drowned.

What Jerome perhaps didn't realise was how easy it is for a gifted, brilliant man to become overconfident, how easy it is for him to rely on his own abilities. Jerome made a big impression in all the universities where he studied and taught.

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It was easy for him to begin to believe that he had all the answers. It was easy for him to forget all that he DIDN'T know.

Jerome pursued a bold and courageous course of reform -- UNTIL he landed in a dungeon.

Shortly after Hus was arrested and tried in the city of Constance, Jerome was apprehended as well. Jerome spent a year in a room -- cold, dark and damp. Sometimes he was chained in an awkward, painful position. He grew ill -- ulcers broke out on his legs.

And finally, Jerome's spirit broke. He agreed to sign a paper declaring that he submitted to the teachings of the church, and that he condemned the errors of Wycliffe and Hus.

Jerome's friend, Hus, had gone to the

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stake for his faith. But Jerome's faith broke. Why? What made the difference? Listen to what one biographer had to say: "Conscious of strength, over-confident of his own abilities, Jerome ventured into situations for which his powers were not equal. That thorough distrust of self which, in the humble Christian heart, is associated with complete dependence on divine strength, and which was a memorable feature in all the experience of Hus, was scarcely noticeable in the earlier encounters of Jerome with his enemies."

What made the difference? One man knew his own weakness and relied completely on divine strength. One man remained teachable. The other was too confident in his own brilliance, his own strength. His faith grew somewhat brittle. And that faith broke.

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Even after Jerome recanted, he was kept imprisoned. He had a lot of time to think and pray. And this man found his way back to an unshakable faith. How? We find a clue in his last trial. There he spoke eloquently -- but with a measure of humility. He stood firmly on Scripture as our final authority.

When threatened with death by fire, Jerome answered, "Is my life so precious to me that I refuse to yield it . . . for Him who gave his life for me?"

When promised favour if he would submit, Jerome replied, "The only favour I demand is to be convinced by the Holy Scriptures."

His accusers asked indignantly, "Do you believe yourself wiser than all the council?"

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Jerome calmly said, “By no means, since I am anxious to be instructed.” He wanted to be taught, he said, “by the Holy Scriptures, which are the torch to enlighten us.”

This was how one observer described Jerome going to the stake: “With cheerful looks, he went readily and willingly to his death . . . He endured the torments of the fire with more tranquility than Socrates in drinking the hemlock.”

Jerome had discovered an unshakable faith. Not by turning into a rigid statue, but by becoming teachable. By relying on divine strength instead of his own brilliance.

After Jerome died, his ashes, like those of Hus, were thrown into a river. It was an attempt to obliterate their memory, their lives, their teachings. But these two

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men live on; their witness remains eloquent. Their example flows from Prague like a great current to every part of the world, to everywhere where believers long for an unshakable faith.

It was said that “Jerome and Hus went to the flames as if invited to a banquet.” Yes, they were going to sit at the feet of Jesus. They were happy. That’s where they had been sitting all along.

Friends, we don’t acquire an unshakable faith by closing our minds and hearts. It’s not a matter of being rigid in our beliefs at all. That just makes us brittle. And a brittle faith tends to break under pressure.

It’s something of a paradox, but an unshakable faith is really a flexible faith. That is, it’s an open and responsive conviction -- a teachable belief.

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Unshakable faith comes from being conscious of weakness, being conscious of all that we DON'T know; it comes from sitting humbly at the feet of Jesus to learn more. That's how we stand fast in the worst of time.

Who are you relying on right now? Where is your source of strength? Are you learning each day from Jesus Christ -- or just defending your religious opinions? Let's determine to become teachable. Let's determine to rely completely on the unlimited power and matchless wisdom of our wonderful Saviour, Jesus Christ.