

**“Brought Before Kings”  
Matthew 10: 16-20**

Jesus said to those bewildered disciples, “you will be brought before kings and governors for my sake. This will be your opportunity to tell the world about me.” Can you imagine their reaction? Each had lived a quiet, unobtrusive life in little Galilee. For whatever strange reason they had left their normal occupations to wander about the villages with a young man whose lectures were riveting hundreds of listeners. They certainly knew how Jesus’ words rankled the religiously elite, but no legal proceedings had been brought against him so far. Here is their teacher, in the Mediterranean sunshine predicting their future, and it wasn’t in any way comforting.

None of them had ever met a king or governor, and they had no desire to do so. Yet with calm authority their hero explained such meetings would take place, during legal trials, and they would be the defendants, not the plaintiffs. With open mouths they listened, earnestly hoping he was mistaken. How could he know such things? When they attached themselves to Jesus, had they taken a tiger by the tail? The simple answer is “yes”.

Jesus tried to reassure them. He said, “don’t fret about what to say. God’s spirit will speak through you!” Their minds raced frantically. “We are going to be making speeches before kings and governors? Our hands are rough and we have a country accent. He must be jesting!” He was not.

It is not easy for ordinary people to speak in the presence of royalty and power. They are so nervous and self-conscious they lose control of the intelligence they possess, and they come across as clumsy and ignorant. I have conducted weddings where the poor groom is overwhelmed. He has never been in a church sanctuary before. The solemnity scares him. He cannot speak, even to say “I do”, and it isn’t because of the unfamiliar necktie he keeps trying to adjust. I have watched it happen more than once. I have to be content with a desperate nod of his sweating head. I assume the marriage is just as real as if had had spoken out loud and clear.

Jesus really wanted his disciples to be prepared. It’s why he forewarned them. But preparation did not include the formulation of speeches. He said the same words he had often used before, “Do not be anxious”. The first step is to cultivate the strength of stillness. Anxiety is the absence of calmness. Worry is the opposite of reasonable thought. I have seen in backward communities how some individual stands out. It may be a woman to whom the poor people turn when an emergency strikes. Neighbors send for her. She comes on the scene of general panic, and her presence begins at once to restore confidence.

It is said of General Lee that he had this gift of calm self-assurance. He could move toward a crucial battle as if he were going to a picnic. None of his powers were

**disordered by anxiety. Everything was intent on a quietly understood and deliberate end. If we are to meet the crises in life, this calmness must be cultivated. It is infinitely better than a prepared speech. Words may fail, but a calm and collected soul will not. You may not realize it, but the nurture of your soul is what Oxford Church is about. Right here in this country chapel you are preparing and strengthening your soul. Your soul. Despite all our culture is doing to take your mind off your soul, it is the most important and most lasting essence of your existence and your personhood. Yes, other things are important. Food and shelter and money are absolutely necessary. But they are not eternal. Your soul is eternal. You will be glad you have spent time in prayer and in corporate worship. Think of it as “soul prepping”.**

**When I use the word “soul”, be aware of the meaning. Your soul is not simply some wispy essence which comes into play only after death. No, it includes everything which makes up your personality, that is, your person. Your soul determines how you act, how you think, how you feel. Your soul decides what you enjoy and what you think is vital in life. It shapes your attitude and your values. If you are living a happy and fruitful life, your soul gets the credit. Recognize the supreme importance of your soul. Don’t forget to thank almighty God for this little church. Here on this hill, surrounded by inspiring natural scenery, you gather with the sweetest people on earth and you nourish your soul. It may well be the most valuable time you and your children can spend anywhere in your lifetime and theirs.**

**I suspect each disciple said to himself: “It will not happen to me. I will never be brought before a king.” Jesus had it right. His predictions were fulfilled. Every one of them faced crises, and many were executed. But by that time they were prepared. Those disciples are not so different from you. You may not have to stand trial before kings and governors. There are other powers which can bring on a crisis. I think of serious illness, which can call me to trial any moment.**

**There is the possibility of bereavement, when I lose the person I love so much. Think of these crises as kings and governors you and I will face. King Calamity. King Bereavement. King Sickness. King Death. And then Jesus spoke of another king who separates the sheep from the goats. You and I may stand trial before him one day. So listen to the careful words of Jesus as he tells his friends how to prepare for the emergencies.**

**He said, “Do not be anxious”. You can learn how to rid yourself of anxiety by trusting God. It really is something you can cultivate. Jesus continued, “fret not what to say, for it is not you who speaks, but the spirit of God who speaks in you.” Lay hold of those last two words, “in you”. Open the doors and let his spirit enter into your soul, as you are doing this moment. In the green pastures and still waters we prepare for the valley of the shadow. In my long life I have seen many people face misfortunes and trials. Without question, those who have strong church affiliation weather the storms far better than those who have never for one minute prepared their souls.**

**I watch with interest the almost obsessive efforts of TV “Doomsday Preppers”. Some of them like to think they have covered every possible contingency. At great expense they have laid in provisions and built defenses. They are determined to survive disaster. Not once have I heard them mention survival of the soul. I must salute such sturdy people. I too am a survivor. But something is missing when no one speaks of the immortal soul. How should we provide for the soul?**

**Jesus told you how and showed you how. As simply as I know how, I relay his words to you this morning. He handled a terror far beyond anything you and I will face. Jesus was very much aware of the immortal soul. The morning of his execution Jesus had stood before King Herod. He refused to speak in his own defense. In the afternoon Jesus was hanging on a cross, slowly suffocating. With one of his final breaths, he calmly said to the dying thief, “today you will be with me in paradise.” There is your model. He was brought before King Herod and did not panic. He was brought before King Death and put aside his life as calmly as one puts aside a garment. Now he sits at the right hand of God, the Bible says. Jesus very clearly insisted we should prepare our souls if we are to have happiness in this life. While we are doing that, he said “and I am preparing something as well. I am preparing a place for you so that where I am, you may be also.”**

**Rev. Dr. Horace Douty  
Oxford Church, Lexington, Virginia  
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