

When I was young, my favorite superhero was Superman. He was tough, he was fast, he was smart, he could fly, and he had x-ray vision. Not to mention he even had girlfriend. More importantly, Superman was my hero because he always saved the day. He helped people who were in danger, put the bad guys in jail and was always on the side of Right.

We've all had our own favorite superhero. And that's good. We admire the qualities of their character and mimic their actions of bravery and justice. They teach us to defend the helpless and vanquish evil doers. We learn about sacrifice and mercy from them.

However, as we grow up, the realities of this world make our superheroes fade into the world of make believe. But, I tell you, we can never afford to forget the lessons they taught us.

Fortunately, we find new heroes - usually about the time we're in high school and have to write a term paper on the subject. When we look for heroes in the real world we find flesh and bone heroes, men and women from American history, or heroes from our ethnic heritage. We find heroes in the fields of medicine, technology, and business. Our heroes may be from our own family or from our community. We read about military heroes from the battle fronts, we see stories about heroic men and women firefighters on the news. These heroes shape our lives because we feel we can really do what they did. They inspire us to look deep inside ourselves and find what it takes to follow in their footsteps.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that "A hero is no braver than an ordinary [person], but he is braver five minutes longer." I think that's why it's easy to find heroes in the Bible. Because God is good, because God is all-powerful, because God answers prayers, because God cares - ordinary people can be brave five minutes longer.

This reminds me of a brave hero from the new testament, a man known to have preached the gospel and worked in at least three different cities. A man whom Paul called a "beloved fellow-servant," and "a bondservant of Christ Jesus." I'm not talking about Barnabas, or even about Timothy. I am talking about the "faithful minister of Christ" known as Epaphras.

I'm sure that some of you know all there is to know about Epaphras, since his name shows up only three times in the Bible. But for that very reason, I'm guessing that Epaphras is a hero most of us don't know much about. I mean he's got one of those Greek names that are hard to pronounce let alone to remember. None the less, Epaphras is a hero who deserves to be recognized.

Epaphras was a Colossian. (Col. 4:12) Thus, he probably came to know Christ when Paul was preaching in Ephesus. I wish I could tell you what line of work he was in, but what I can tell you is that once he heard the good news of Jesus Christ, Epaphras had an inkling to preach.

Paul credits Epaphras with bringing the gospel to the Colossians. Now that's a brave hero. Epaphras was willing to go to his home town and preach the gospel. Usually, "no prophet is welcomed in his hometown" (Luke 4:24), but, Epaphras went to his own people, people that knew all the skeletons in his closet, people that knew him when he was in diapers, people whose daughters he dated and people who he had worked for or employed. Despite all this, Epaphras was still able to lead some of the Colossians to faith in Christ, instill in them a love for all the saints, and give them the hope of heaven. (Col. 1:4-5)

Paul also credits Epaphras with working in the churches in Laodicea and in Hierapolis! (Col 4:13) At the time, these cities were larger and more influential than Epaphras' hometown. Was this daunting to Epaphras? No! These cities were near by and he probably had to travel

there on business now and again anyway, so with the Spirit burning in his heart and the Word of God on his lips, Epaphras was brave enough to share his faith with the big city folk too!

Epaphras must have been brave to preach the rebellious message of Christianity, while living in the boundary of the Roman Empire. Epaphras risked the charges of inciting riots and upsetting the nature order. Christianity undermined the government for the Kingdom of God was more important. One main theme of Colossians is the identity and supremacy of Christ. Epaphras was brave to share this revolutionary confession in an environment which was so hostile to competing claims of power.

Epaphras' heroic nature is further revealed when we realize that he preached a monotheistic message into a polytheistic culture. This must have been frustrating for Epaphras' ministry to those he converted because it's one of the issues he tells Paul about. You see, Paul corrects the Colossian Christians on their practice of angel worship. People were used to dwelling on their visions in a polytheistic religion and during a flood someone had seen a vision of Michael saving the city from destruction. Based on that vision, it seems that the Colossians ended up ascribing to an in-depth angelology with Michael as the head. Instead of letting this slide, Epaphras was brave enough to take a stand against such a heresy.

Epaphras was also brave because he preached the gospel in communities which were very Jewish. Cicero indicated that in the three cities in which we know that Epaphras preached there were about 10,000 Jewish men! (Dict Of NT Bkgnd) From among these devoted Jews there must have been some proselytizing the Colossian Christians because Epaphras asked Paul to deal with questions about ceremonial laws concerning food and drink, religious festivals, and circumcision.

Additionally, Epaphras' heroic character had to deal with a strong inclination toward Gnostic thinking. Through Paul's letter we see all the empty philosophies of aesthetic regulations, secret knowledge, and dependence upon human wisdom and tradition that the Colossian Christians were being baited with. Epaphras constantly had to be on the defensive against all sorts and mixtures of philosophies trying to deny the work and deity of Christ. A hero's work is never done.

Because Epaphras preached to his hometown it probably took him 5 minutes longer to convince those that knew him or knew of him, the truth of Christianity. Because Epaphras was from a second-rate market town, it probably took him 5 minutes longer to formulate the right words and arguments so he would be taken seriously in the bustling centers of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Every time Epaphras was hassled by Roman authorities, I can hear the Spirit encouraging him saying, "just 5 minutes longer." I bet it took Epaphras 5 minutes longer to explain full and solitary devotion to the one true God to a former worshipper of many gods. Although he was a hero, I'm sure Epaphras' hair turned gray because of the ongoing debate with the Jewish and Gnostic insurgents which always seemed to last 5 minutes longer. Epaphras was a brave hero, a faithful minister of the gospel.

We too are each ministers of the gospel. We are people of God's good news, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, he was raised from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of God. Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to be our counselor. Because of these things we can be brave for at least 5 minutes longer. Epaphras was not a superhero like superman. He didn't need to be and neither do we. All we have to do is take 5 minutes here and there to become a hero of the faith.