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## Family Honor (2012)

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# Family Honor

*By Taylor Ward*

*A hero is someone who understands the responsibility that comes with his freedom.*

~ Bob Dylan

The famous musician makes a great point: if you want to be a hero, remember there are certain responsibilities that come with your heroic action. There are also generous prices to be paid if one is a hero. Antigone in Sophocles' play *Antigone* paid the ultimate price by breaking the law and being put to death for being a hero and laying her brother to rest how she thought fit.

There are many incidences that happen in *Antigone* that prove that Antigone acted as a heroine, but the first example is her initial act of burying her brother. After a duel between her two brothers in which both died, Eteokles is buried like a king while Polyneices's body is left out to face the elements. Kreon, the king of Thebes, spreads the news that if anyone buries Polyneices they will be sentenced to death. Although Antigone knows this, she still goes and buries her brother. At one point

Antigone says, "Whoever shall perform any prohibited act shall be liable to the penalty of death by stoning in the presence of the assembled citizens. You can see that you'll have to act quickly to prove you are as brave today as you were born to be" (22. 39-44). This quote shows that she was completely aware of the consequences that her actions could hold. Her sister Ismene goes on to say, "You mean to bury him? In spite of the edict?" (22. 51). Then Antigone retorts, "He's my brother and yours too; and whether you will or not, I'll stand by him" (22. 52-53). She knows what she is doing and doesn't care because her honor for her family means more than death. I call that heroic because she put her own life on the line just to bury her brother. This is just one of the first examples of her many heroic moments. I call this heroism and some might call this stupidity, mostly because she got caught in the act of burying her brother. But her actions weren't about getting caught, they were about honoring someone in her family. Although her brother Polyneices killed her other brother Eteokles and tried to overthrow the government, she still cared enough to make sure he got a proper burial. Others could look at this as her trying to get some kind of attention or credit, but why would some risk their life to get attention. She was trying to give dignity to her dead brother. She wasn't trying to make a feeble attempt to grab the attention of others.

Another example of her heroism is the fact that she actually owned up to her actions. When she is caught at her brother's grave and is

brought in front of Kreon he asks her if she had anything to do with the burying of her brother's body. Antigone answers, "I did it. I deny nothing" (38. 541). She could have denied all ties to the crime by saying the sentry was lying but she didn't. In a true act of heroism and bravery she stood before the king and told him she did it. Antigone showed that she had no regret for her actions, and she was not ashamed that she did what had to be done maintain to some of her brother's dignity. Some would say that this was the only option that she had. All she could do was confess because she was caught at the grave trying to cover her brother back up. Really it was the Sentry who found her, and Kreon was convinced at the beginning of the play that the Sentry did it anyways. Antigone could have blamed it on him instead of owning up to it.

I think yet another testament of her heroism is that she didn't drag her sister into the mess with her. Kreon believes that Antigone's sister Ismene helped her bury their brother so he fetches Ismene to share her sister's punishment. At one point Ismene actually tells Kreon that she took part in the crime when she says, "I did it. If she is with me now, I share the blame with her and will bear it also" (42. 557-558). To this Antigone says, "You will not die, not with me you won't. You had nothing to do with this; don't try to claim you had. I will die, and the dead be served well" (42. 670-672). Antigone could have dragged her sister down with her because of the simple fact that Ismene refused to honor her brother like Antigone. However Antigone chose to take the high road

which is a huge testament of heroism. Again, some would argue that she didn't want to deflect the attention from herself by allowing Ismene to partake in the blame, but she left her out of it. She was probably upset in the first place that Ismene decided not to honor her brother and if she wanted to be really malicious she could have blame her as well. Antigone didn't though. It had nothing to do with attention. If she wanted attention, why would she have not made a bigger spectacle out of the entire incident? Antigone quietly buried her dead brother for her satisfaction, not anyone else's.

Yet another moment in the play that also shows Antigone's heroism is that fact that she stands up to Kreon when no one else dares to. After being caught and brought in front of the king Antigone says, "The laws they have made for men are well marked out. I didn't suppose your decree had strength enough, or you, who are humans, to violate the lawful traditions the gods have not written merely, but made infallible" (39. 554-558). This is where Antigone makes her stand telling Kreon that she doesn't believe that the law was passed down by the gods. This action is huge because I would say insulting the man who holds your life in his hands could make things worse. Antigone then goes on to say, "I did not intend to pay, before the gods, for breaking these laws because of my fear of one man and his principles. I was thoroughly aware I would die before you proclaimed it; of course I would die, even if you hadn't" (39. 562-567). Antigone continues to stand up for not only herself but for

anyone who finds themselves in this position again. She is telling him how unjust his law is instead of begging for her life or denying her crime. Some would say that the only reason Antigone is doing this is because she is going to die anyway, but really she is criticizing the fact that the king is not being fair with his laws. This unjust law could hurt others in the future, so Antigone is really trying to say, "Hey this isn't right and everyone regardless of what they did while they were living should get a proper burial." She wants to save the lives of the others who might have to go through this in the future.

As Bob Dylan has stated, a hero knows the responsibility of freedom. Antigone wanted to be free from an unjust law and took it as her responsibility to bury her brother as a hero. She paid the ultimate price of her life to be respectful to her brother. Antigone knew that if she was caught what would happen, and she accepted that responsibility. Even though she gave up her freedom and her life, she let it be known that she doesn't regret it. Antigone was a heroine because she knew the cause and effect of her actions, and she did what was morally right.

#### Works Cited

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Trans. Richard Braun. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.