

FEAR, COURAGE, AND THE KINGDOM LIFE



And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said vehemently, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.

Mark 14:26-31

Here we have a description of Christendom in this country, at this hour.

Boldness inside the walls, and boldness when we're together.

We sing “*This is the Feast of Victory for our God, Hallelujah. The lamb that was slain has begun his reign, Hallelujah!*” And we mean it. *Jesus is Lord. He's on the throne, we're his servants. We won't deny him, even if it costs us our life.*

But then two strange things happened to our courage.

The first is this.

And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I pray.” And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch.” And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy.



Mark 14:32-40a

Our Courage Falters when Praying

The first thing that happens to our courage when we leave the security of the church walls, is that it falters when we start to pray, it loses momentum.

Our eyes become heavy.

Our minds become so tired and we just can't seem to concentrate.

We make resolutions. We're going to do it. We're going to be disciplined in this matter. And again and again, it seems to slide off.

“Stay awake and pray. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”, Jesus said.

And again and again we slip off the track.

The multitude comes with their clubs and their sticks and their swords. Jesus rises from the ground, from his prayer, and he moves toward them, toward the danger without batting an eyelash. He's clear about where he's going. The disciples are now wide awake. And whatever courage they had left is gone. They all forsake him and flee. Peter follows at a distance into the courtyard of the High Priest. He hears them insulting Jesus, questioning him, condemning him to death. He sees the soldiers beating him, spitting in his face, laughing at him, taunting him.

And here comes the second thing that happens to our courage.



And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came; and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you mean.” And he went out into the gateway. And the cock crowed. And the maid saw him, and began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” But again he denied it. And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak.” And immediately the cock crowed a second time. (Mark 14: 66-72)

Our Courage Shrivels when called to Take a Stand

The second thing that happens to our courage when we're called upon to take a stand with our mouth and with our life with Jesus, suddenly we shrivel, we wither. Like Peter. Now we know that Peter, in a matter of days from this episode emerged up out of this paralyzing cowardice, and entered into a life of courage by the power of the blood of the Lamb, by the power of the resurrection and by the power of the Spirit. Peter entered into a life of courage so strong and so clear that eventually he had the privilege of also laying down his life, for the name of the Lord.

You could say that Peter crossed over the Jordan. He went in and took the promised land!

He threw his cowardice away, and put on courage.

He went in and conquered.

But we are stuck on the tent side of the Jordan and we've been stuck here all our lives.

If there is anything that describes professing Christians in this land at this time, if there's anything that marks us... It's that professing Christians in this land, at this time have exchanged respectability for courage. We walk out of our respectable churches, wearing our respectable faces, living our respectable lives. And we almost never say or do one thing that might arouse the slightest serious opposition.

When the world thinks of Christians, it never thinks of people who are bold.

When the world thinks of Christians, it thinks of people who are respectable. Who are a little bit prudish. Often, quite self-righteous. It thinks of people who are abnormally fearful.

And it's usually right.

And even the Christians who like to march around with their placards, and say their prayers in front of the TV cameras, or stand up for whatever cause they happen to be into at the moment, give the impression largely of people who might not be so courageous if they were cut away from their peers, or if the opposition started playing hardball. We have done very little to convince ourselves or anybody else that we're courageous.

Now we thank God for the outpouring of his Spirit that has touched our lives in past years. We praise God for the increase in vision and in faith that most of us have already experienced, for the changes that have happened in most of our lives which can't be described in any other way but to say they're miraculous.

But we need to understand that the revival of the Spirit will not move until the people of God....

manifest courage.

A courage that drives us out into that world with a burning message and lives that match it.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1: 1-9

Again, the people of Israel were standing on the borders of the Promised Land. 40 years before, their fathers had been there. They had come near to the border and the Lord had told them to go in and take the land. And they chickened out. 40 years have passed. Conditions across the Jordan in that land haven't changed. They still have giants in that land, and superior armies over there. They have Hittites who have iron weapons coming out of their ears.

And the Lord says *“go in and take that land. I'm giving it to you. But I'm not giving it to you on a silver platter. You're going to go in and you're going to take it”*.

From the time that the people of Israel left Egypt, all through their wilderness wanderings with Moses they manifested a pitiful lack of courage. Every time anything went wrong they fell apart, their knees turned to jelly. Time after time. But now this has to change

What God says to Joshua has to go down through Joshua to the whole nation.

“Be strong and of good courage.

Don't be afraid.

Don't be confused and dismayed.

I'm with you”.

Joshua responds. The people respond, and they go in, and they take the land.



Now it's our turn. We're standing on the border of the Promised Land, across the Jordan. Over there is a world which has been dominated by Satan since the beginning of history. And the Lord says to us, go in there and take it from him in my name. Set the captives free.

And where there are people who insist on serving Satan and his kingdom, wipe the dust off your feet. Don't mess around. Leave them for the mopping up armies, but keep moving. Don't sit around and think and talk and never do. Get in there and do it.

And we say, *“O, Lord, I'm so inadequate. I'm not ready yet. I'm waiting for that boldness to come. I don't have vision. I haven't got enough faith”*.

And the Lord says, *“have not I commanded you? Haven't I told you? Be strong and of good courage. If I tell you to have courage, I'm giving you courage. Use it, do something with it. Get in there and live it”*.

The courage the Lord is giving us and commanding us to exercise is basically fourfold.

Have the courage to say “yes”.

First of all, he says to us have the courage to say “yes”. Instead of maybe, or perhaps, or I'll see how it goes, maybe tomorrow.

Have the courage to say “yes”.

And he came and found him sleeping. He said to Peter, Simon. Are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

If Peter had at this point said ... “Yes, Lord, if I have to put toothpicks in my eyelids, I'm going to stay awake”. It would have made a difference, a tremendous difference.

Now it's our turn and he says to us,

“The spirit is willing and the flesh is weak. Stay awake and pray”.

Get a prayer life and stick to it.

Even if we've tried 50 times or 100 times and it failed.... Today, right now, this hour the Lord is saying

“The spirit is willing. The Flesh is weak. Stay awake and pray”.

Have a prayer life. There will be no courage in anybody's life until they do.

What we need to do first off is to say “yes”. Today! “Yes”!

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came, and, seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, you also were with the Nazarene Jesus.

And instead of saying, “well, no, I don't know what you're talking about”... He could have said “yes! I was and I still am”.

How many times has this happened in almost every one of our lives? Somebody comes up and says, “Oh, you're one of those Jesus freaks”! And right away we back off. We want to make sure that they understand that we're not like ‘those Jesus freaks’.

What a difference it will make if we simply say “Yes, I am”!

Go ahead. Never mind if they misunderstand, or misconstrue, or throw us in with a thousand crazies. Stand up, say “yes” without apology, without any qualifications, “yes, I am”! You connect me with Jesus. I'm proud to belong. What a difference it will make.

-Be strong and of good courage.

-Don't be afraid... Say yes!

Have the courage to say “no”.

***Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.
Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.***

Luke 10: 3

We also need to learn how to say no, to have the courage to say “no”....To say “no” to the old prophet.

The king said to the man of God, “Come home with me for a meal, and I will give you a gift.” But the man of God answered the king, “Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: ‘You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.’” So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel. Now there was a certain old prophet living in Bethel, whose sons came and told him all that the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to the king. Their father asked them, “Which way did he go?” And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken. So he said to his sons, “Saddle the donkey for me.” And when they had saddled the donkey for him, he mounted it and rode after the man of God. He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?” “I am,” he replied. So the prophet said to him, “Come home with me and eat.” The man of God said, “I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the Lord: ‘You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.’” The old prophet answered, “I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: ‘Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.’” (But he was lying to him.) So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house. While they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your ancestors.’” When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was left lying on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it.



1 Kings 13:7-24

That old prophet waits down the road for us. We've been sent to go down there and do a job, to say what needs to be said. Not to eat bread or drink water in that territory, but to get out again. And we're down there and here comes the old prophet and he says, "the Lord just showed me you're to have dinner at my house".

"The Lord Showed Me"

But if you go and have dinner at his house, right in the middle of the meal that old prophet will stand up and say, "*You've disobeyed God, you're not going to get out of here alive*".

That old prophet comes with a message. He always tailors it to wherever we are.

Perhaps the message that, yes it is possible to serve God and mammon. "*Why some of the greatest Christians in this country are serving God and mammon, it's obvious. You can too*".

You're not to argue with him, you're not to say anything back. Just say "no", and off you go.

Sometimes the old prophet comes along and says here's a little something for your ego to give you encouragement, as you serve Jesus. Say no!

And sometimes the old prophet pulls out a bottle and pulls off the cork, and says here you can't live without this. Let me pour you a drink.

And for each of us, the content of that bottle may be different.

For some, it is alcohol. There are some of us who are still saying to themselves, "*someday, maybe, I'll stop... I know I have a problem*". But the Lord is saying, "I want you to say "no". Even if you don't think you can do it, I'll help you, just admit that you have this problem. Stop lying to yourself. Say No! Be clear".

For some, it's drugs. "I still think I can mess my head all up, be high and follow Jesus". The old prophet says, "*inhale, inject, snort, drink, take this pill, roll a joint*".

For some, the content of that bottle is fantasy. It's nothing that you can touch but every time life gets a little rough, we draw into our favorite little fantasy, whatever it is.

For some, it's the past... we idealize the past.

For some, it's dreams... about what we are going to do someday or all kinds of weird things.

For some, it's lust...our escape is lust.

But through his offers, the old prophet has got our number. He says, "Come in, sit down, let me give you something. You deserve some comfort, take a rest, take some nourishment. You haven't had yours yet today, and you know you need it today".

Have the courage to say no.

Begin.... today.... to say no.

Have the Courage to Confess that Jesus is Lord

Then we need to have the courage to confess, out there, that Jesus is Lord. It's great when people stand up in church and say "I'm standing up for Jesus". But the place we need to do that is out there.

Listen to Peter just a few weeks after he denied his Lord. It didn't take him long. Standing in front of a crowd of people in Jerusalem, shouting at the top of his lungs...



Fellow Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having released him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

Acts 2:22-24

Jesus is Lord. He's risen from the dead and he is Lord. We sing it. We say it in church, but the place it needs to be said is... out there.

Who's going to say it out there.... if we don't?

Sure, they made fun of Peter too. They laughed at Paul. They killed James. They stoned Stephen. But these men and women continued to confess his lordship to their dying breath.

If we really believe that he's Lord, and if we really believe that he's the one who worked the miracle in our lives...Why are we afraid to say it out there?

Have the courage to confess his name!

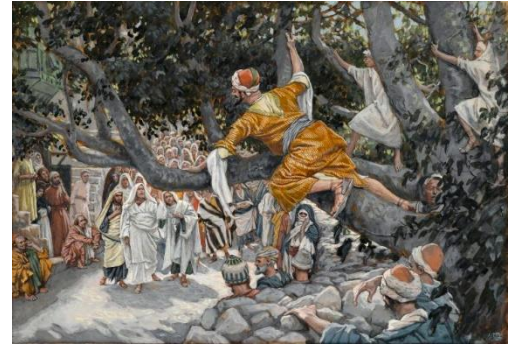
Have the Courage to Act Decisively

And finally, have the courage to act decisively as a man or woman of God. We know how to act decisively if somebody cheats us out of \$20, we holler and screech and jump up and down. We know what to do if someone cheats us out of money. We know what to do if somebody sells us something that's an inferior product. We can be decisive. We know who to call, the Better Business Bureau, the mayor's office. We will call somebody to get results.

But when it comes to the things of the kingdom of God we pussyfoot. We tiptoe.

Here's a man who could have tiptoed, he needed to do something, but he didn't tiptoe. Little Zacchaeus. Here's this crowd and Zacchaeus is small and he can't see. He doesn't tiptoe. He runs down the road and climbs a tree. He does something decisive!

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner"



Luke 19: 1-7

But this sinner, at least knew what to do--he didn't mince around and pussyfoot. He got right to it.

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..."

Luke 19:8-9a

So he climbs the tree and jumps down from the tree.

Dinner time comes and this man makes up his mind. He has decided.

"Lord, half my goods I'm going to give to the poor" \$750,000.00-gone. "And if I've cheated anybody, I'm going to restore it fourfold", another \$400,000-gone! "And with the rest, I'm going to serve you".

If there is any group of people in our culture who deserve to be looked upon as people who pussyfoot...it's the professing Christian.

The word of the Lord, to the Body of Christ on this earth at this hour is, courage.

- ***"Have Courage!***
- Be strong and of good courage.***
- Stop messing around.***
- Have the courage to say yes, have the courage to say no.***
- Have the courage to confess that name of Jesus, have the courage to act, move, do something".***

In the times ahead, that courage will be tested.

By that courage, our message will have a force it never had before.

By that courage, we will go in and we will take the land.

Be strong and of good courage.

Don't be afraid.

Don't be confused,

for the Lord your God is with you, wherever you go.



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Prayer: Oh Lord, may we experience your presence, your power, your love in such a way that we can't help but speak of you and your wonders. As we do this, may we know that you are with us wherever we go. And in the confidence of your presence and the joy of being loved by you, O wonderful one, may we find the courage we need. And Lord give us the courage to say yes to you....to keep praying, keep seeking you, keep desiring you, keep calling to you...keep us awake so our faith does not falter. Give us the courage to say "no" to the things that separate us from you, that veer us away from following your call in our lives. Give us the courage and love of you to confess your name.... your beautiful, lovely name, sweet Jesus. And Lord give us the courage to act decisively.... to not tiptoe ...to move forward ...to boldly share your name, your wonder with this sin-sick world. And yes Lord, by the courage you place in us may our confession, our message have a force like it has never had before and may we have the courage to go in and take the land.

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