

IT TAKES COURAGE

October 30th 2011

I mentioned last week that our 2012 theme would center around courage. “Be strong and of a good courage” God told Joshua. What is “courage”? My old tattered 1965 Webster’s Dictionary says this:

Courage: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty”

Synonyms include METTLE, SPIRIT, RESOLUTION, and TENACITY: COURAGE implies firmness of mind and will in the face of danger or extreme difficulty. METTLE suggests an ingrained capacity for meeting strain or difficulty with fortitude and resilience. SPIRIT also suggests a quality of temperament enabling one to hold one’s own or keep up one’s morale when opposed or threatened; RESOLUTION stresses firm determination to achieve one’s own ends; TENACITY adds to RESOLUTION implications of stubborn persistence and unwillingness to admit defeat.

Do we have the courage to be courageous? Courage is not something you go to school to learn to do. It is something you have inside you. In the movie the Wizard of Oz the cowardly lion believed he was a coward and without courage. He asked the wizard to give him courage. All the wizard did was give him a token of courage and the lion believed he was courageous. In fact, he was courageous all along. He just needed someone with power to encourage him to be courageous.

Isn’t it amazing that God and Moses told Joshua many, many times to be of good courage. To be courageous! Have you ever wondered why it took so many repetitions? Why is it we, as Christians are afraid to be courageous? Could it be that so many “wizards” in our lives have told us we, as Christians, were to be timid, passive, to “turn the other cheek”. Too many Christians end up believing that self-confidence equals arrogance and pride. You will never have courage if you lack in self-confidence, for confidence and courage come from the same compartment in our heart. You will never believe in “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me” if you have no confidence or courage. For doing all things through Christ takes confidence and courage!

1. IT TAKES COURAGE TO GET GOING!

- a. Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.
- b. Joshua 3:6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.
- c. Every journey begins with a step. “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. We all remember those words from Neil Armstrong as he set foot on the moon. History is filled with stories of adventurers, men and women who dared to dream, explore and discover. In 1953 Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first to conquer Mount Everest, more than 25 years after the first climbers attempted to top the summit. We remember names like Orville and Wilbur Wright and Amelia Earhart, all pioneers of aviation.
- d. Sadly, too many Christians today live anything but an adventurous life. They seem content to be absorbed in the daily grind. They think the adventuresome life of faith is for someone else they could never become. We are among a dysfunctional society desperately in need of heroes who refuse to limit what God can do. We can’t afford to buy the twenty-first century lie that our best days are behind us. I challenge you to dream big! As D.L. Moody used to say, “If God is your partner, make your plans big!” Henry Ford said, “I am looking for a lot of men who have an infinite capacity to not know what can’t be done.” God is looking for men and women who believe that with Christ, nothing is impossible.
- e. Where are you headed? Genesis 25 speaks of Abraham’s legacy: **Genesis 25:8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.** He fulfilled his purpose and was ready to die. Nothing left to be done. He had “run the race and kept the faith”. Most of us will not be great in the eyes of the world, but we can be remembered as Abraham, a man who heard the voice of God and followed...a man known as a friend of God. **James 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.**
- f. Over the years I have seen far too many cynical, sour and bitter Christians. They don’t seem happy with any aspect of their lives, so they grumble and complain. I wonder what their lives would have been like if they had bought into God’s plan instead of the great “worldly dream”, which ends up being a nightmare. Don’t come to the end of your life asking, “what if...?” There is a world of difference between standing at a grave and saying, “What a life!” and standing at a grave saying, “What a waste...” How will we be remembered?
- g. Have the courage to get going. Start moving your feet for the cause of Christ!

2. IT TAKES COURAGE TO MAKE UP YOUR MIND

- a. 1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.
- b. We know the story. The prophets of Baal against Elijah. We see the difference one godly man can make. Look at his entrance: 1 Kings 18:8 And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. Elijah is here! When Elijah showed up everything changed. No one could be neutral as to the presence of Elijah. He was either a troublemaker or a problem solver, depending on which side you were on.
- c. Where is the Christian today that the world would take notice of? Where are the Christians with the backbone of Elijah? Where are those who would stand against public opinion and speak for God? Elijah was a man who didn't hesitate to call people to make up their minds about God.
- d. God is on the lookout for men and women wholly surrendered to Him. The answer is either yes or no; there is no in-between. Jesus said you are either for Me, or against Me.
- e. D.L. Moody heard someone say that God was waiting to show the world what He could do through one wholly surrendered man, and Moody responded, "By the grace of God, I'll be that man!" Who might be that man (or woman) today? Joshua and Caleb were two of those men. Numbers 32:11-12 Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD.
- f. Joshua and Caleb had the courage to make up their minds. They were not going to side with the majority. They were going to glorify God and trust in Him for the victory. Will we?

3. IT TAKES COURAGE TO STIR UP THE GIFT

- a. 2 Timothy 1:6-8 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;
- b. God has given every born again Christian skills, abilities, talents, gifts. Far too many Christians allow those gifts to remain dormant. Paul is exhorting young Timothy to STIR UP THE GIFT! Set it ablaze! Stoke the fire! In Ephesians 4, Paul tells the church to "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you were

called". Jesus says to be of the world, but not in the world. This does not mean we are to avoid non-Christians, nor does it mean we become a chameleon. It means we have been delivered from a desire to follow the attitudes of the culture. What Jesus said about taking up the cross, and dying to self is not in fine print; it's headline news in the Gospels.

- c. Let's suppose I used the principle of multiplication. Suppose I find a young Timothy, lead him to Christ, and pour into him for six months. Then I find another young man, and Timothy also finds another young man and begins to work with him. Every six months we (and they) lead someone else to Christ and mentor them. At the end of one year, we would have four, and at the end of two years, sixteen. At the end of sixteen years we would have four billion followers of Jesus Christ. How is that possible? We take seriously the call to invest ourselves in others. We don't allow the fire to go out in our lives or theirs. We lead them to a point where they can lead others, and the process continues.
- d. So, get stirred up! Find your Timothy. Who will be the first to answer that call?

Finally, it takes courage to make a decision for Christ. You may be here today without the joy of the Lord in your heart. You have never had the courage to make that all important life changing decision to ask Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour. Why not come today? Have the courage to step out, come down here, take my hand and allow me to show you the pathway to salvation.

Christians, it takes courage to admit you need to make up your mind to get started to stir up the gifts and talents God has given you. Take that step today. Be "strong and of a good courage" and commit all of yourself to a loving God.