

EFC

January 14, 2024

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

“Christian Courage in the Cause of Christ”

Good morning, EFC. My name is Jeremy, and I’m one of the Pastors here. I’m happy to be back with you this morning after some vacation time. I want to thank Pastors John and Chris for their service in my absence. I am very grateful to God for the team of ministers He has gifted us with.

As we come into a New Year, I’m going to take this morning as an opportunity to look forward to this coming year, before we begin our series in Revelation next Sunday. As I thought and prayed about it, I want to share with you about a theme I believe God wants to grow me in for this coming year: courage. This is an area I want to grow in this year, and I think the Lord wants to mature me here. (burnout, recovery, learned helplessness, natural fears, etc.)

Pray.

When I decided to focus this morning on being courageous as we follow God, I didn’t realize I made that decision on the 68th anniversary of when 5 young Christian missionaries gave their lives in Ecuador for the cause of Christ. Jim Elliot, along with four other missionaries in the jungles of Ecuador, courageously followed God to share the Gospel with the Huaorani people, and were murdered on January 8, 1956. They are a model of Christian courage.

My dad was a model of Christian courage as well, because he was willing to make difficult and costly decisions out of his desire to honor Christ. As an Elder; as president of the board of a Christian camp. He resolutely did what he believed God would have him do, even though it was painful and difficult – he was a model of Christian courage.

We are also faced with the need for Christian courage today.

Merriam-Webster defines courage this way: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty”

But our goal as Christians is not merely courage; our goal is Christian courage: “Boldness and fortitude to walk by faith as we follow God and honor Christ in all of life and death, no matter the difficulty.”

We read of Christian courage throughout the Bible, with Paul clearly capturing the idea:

- Philippians 1:12-14, 20-21 “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Christian courage can look like a lot of things:

- To believe what God says in a world that considers Him/it foolish or arrogant or naïve or unacceptable
- To tell of Jesus, knowing you may be ridiculed for it
- To walk by faith and not by sight, even when you can't see how God is working things out
- To live for eternity rather than today
- To seek first God's kingdom rather than our own
- To consider others more important than ourselves, to the point of sacrifice

Courage is one of those things that we like to admire and talk about, but it is not always natural to live courageously; it's all too easy to be apathetic, unengaged, go with the flow. Courage to follow Christ with conviction and dedication, to honor Him in life and death, is something we desperately need, and can't take for granted. We need to grow to be courageous Christ followers, by God's grace and with His help.

In Deuteronomy 31 we find the people of Israel in need of godly courage.

Context: 40 years earlier, the Israelites had first come to the border of the Promised Land, and they lacked courage; instead, they allowed their fear of strong enemies and their own sense of inadequacy to control them. God promised to give them the land of Caanan and commanded them to go take it. But they refused to trust God and suffered 40 years in the wilderness for their lack of courageous faith.

Now, 40 years later, they stand at the border again, faced with the same decision: will they trust God and follow Him, though their enemies are strong – or will they once again allow fear to dominate? Will they walk by faith in God, or will they walk merely by their own sight? Will they trust God and His strength, or doubt because of their own limitations? Will they be courageous and follow God, or will they give in to fear and turn back?

Also consider this: Moses was not going with them! He had been the only leader most of them had known – and what a leader he had been: conquering, providing, leading! Now he is about to die, and a new leader will step up; will they see that God has been their leader all along and continue to follow Him courageously? Or will they look at Joshua, and doubt God's wisdom and provision for them?

Deuteronomy 31:1-8 So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.' The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

God is commanding the people of Israel to be follow Him with unwavering resolve. This is the definition of Christian courage. But again, courage is easy to talk about, and difficult to live out at times. What is the source of courage in the life of a Christian? This passage gives us four insights into where our courage comes from.

Courage in the life of God's people comes from God's presence with us. Moses told the people that even though he wasn't going with them, God was. In fact, two times Moses makes the connection between courage and God's presence obvious: "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." (verse 6) and "Be strong and courageous.... It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." (verses 7-8)

Example: Josiah and the fireworks

Courage comes from God's presence with us. This was not only true in Moses' day, it is true today as well. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus promised to never leave us! God is with us, and lives within every Christian; take courage, we are never alone!

This passage also shows us that courage comes from knowing God's promises. As Moses speaks with the people, he reminds them that God has promised to give them the land. In verse 3 he says, "The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken."

Hebrews 6:18 tells us that it is impossible for God to lie! Everything He says is true, and everything He promises must come true, for He is God. What a source of courage for us! This is part of why we are encouraging us all to read through the Bible together: so that we come to know God and hear His unfailing words to us. God always speaks the truth, God always keeps His word – so let us always build our lives upon what He says is true! God has promised good to all who trust in Christ (Romans 8:28); take courage, God always keeps His promises.

Deuteronomy 31 also shows us that courage comes from recognizing God's power. The enemies of Israel they were going to have to face were mighty indeed; giants, fortified cities, mighty armies. But God is far mightier; He would destroy their enemies, and nothing could stop Him from keeping His promises. God is almighty, the only God.

Again, this is not only for Israel's encouragement; it is for ours as well. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Take courage, God is all powerful, and nothing can stop His good purposes.

We have seen so far that the source of Christian courage is God's presence, promises, and power. Finally, Deuteronomy 31 shows us that a source of our courage is God's past proofs. God has proven He is trustworthy time and again; we can look back and see it for our encouragement. In verse 4 Moses reminded the people how God had proven Himself in the past: "And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them." Israel could trust God and follow Him courageously because they were witnesses of God's past faithfulness.

Reminder from the “Big Story. Bigger God.” Series: for the entirety of human history, God has proven He is trustworthy, and therefore we can be courageous. If you are a Christian, you, too, are witness of God’s trustworthiness. Take courage, God has never failed!

Christian courage is boldness and fortitude to walk by faith as we follow God and honor Christ in all of life and death, no matter the cost. And God Himself is the source of our courage: His presence, His promises, His power, His past proofs. It’s not that we are strong or smart or capable or so faithful; it’s that He is! So look to him, and be encouraged!

Which brings me to my final thought. What is it that you need to face with Christian courage as you come into this new year? Perhaps you already know some of the challenges you will face; there will be others you are not yet aware of. But as you think about it, where is God calling you to follow Him by faith?

- Ministers in difficult places: To keep on at what God has called you to, when it would be so much easier to give up (but humbly changing/going/stopping when God makes that clear, too)
- Witnesses of God’s faithfulness even when the country is going through difficult times – take the opportunity, proclaim your faith in Christ and the Gospel that supersedes the troubles of this world
- As we face hardship, loss, and health issues – be courageous to tell of your hope in Christ, who holds you even as you suffer
- The decision you know He is calling you to, but you have been hesitating because it seems too daunting, and you’re afraid.
- To share the good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ with family and coworkers and friends, at the risk of ridicule and loss
- To respond to God’s calling and risk everything for the honor of Christ