



## The Courage Of The Cross

**John 19:39-40 KJV** And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound *weight*. [40] Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

### I. INTRODUCTION—VIRTUES

-There are certain virtues of life that all people should desire to have woven into the fiber of their character. Virtues such as:

- Self-Discipline
- Compassion
- Responsibility
- Friendship
- Work
- Courage
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Loyalty
- Faith
- Dependability
- Adaptability

-A virtue is a good moral trait that affects behavior and action in one's life. Virtues are the basic foundational essentials that cause us to think in certain directions of morality. Virtues assist us to do what is right and to balk at doing what is wrong or sinful.

-What we often discover in life and our walk with God is that there are trials and tribulations of life that bend and weave these virtues into us. In fact these virtues are often placed in us in situations of duress or when we are called upon to make a difficult decision.

-Paul wrote to Timothy that one of the reasons that Scripture was given to us was for "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). He was telling Timothy that the Bible is a useful book of virtues for righteous living.

-Its principles and people are all working together to help us to see what to strive for in this life we have been given to live by God. If you wonder why nations sink to horrific moral filth and lose their way, it is because their virtues have been deserted.

-God and His Word are the greatest motivators of any virtue that comes into the heart of a man.

-Paul did not necessarily call them virtues but rather he called them the fruit of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22-23 KJV** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

-How desperately that we all need these things in our lives!

### II. THE VIRTUE OF COURAGE

-There is a specific virtue that we probably all desire to have in our lives. It is the virtue of courage.

#### A. Quotes on Courage

**J. Oswald Sanders**—Courage is that quality of mind which enables men to encounter danger or difficulty with firmness, or without fear or depression of spirits. . . The highest degree of courage is seen in the person who is most fearful but refuses to capitulate to it.

**Richter**—Courage consists not in blindly overlooking danger, but in seeing and conquering it.

**Jacques Maritain**—A coward flees backward, away from new things. A man of courage flees forward, in the midst of new things.

**Sydney Smith**—A great deal of talent is lost in this world for the want of a little courage.

#### B. Biblical Quotes on Courage

**1 Corinthians 16:13 KJV** Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

**Deuteronomy 31:8 KJV** And the LORD, he *it is* that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

**Deuteronomy 31:23 KJV** And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them: and I will be with thee.

**Joshua 1:7 KJV** Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

**Numbers 13:30 KJV** And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

**Hebrews 13:6 KJV** So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

**Psalms 27:1-2 KJV A Psalm of David.** The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? [2] When the wicked, *even* mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

### C. Be Courageous!

-From *Discipleship Journal*, Skip Gray writes:

When Joseph Ton was a pastor in Romania he was arrested by the secret police for publishing a sermon calling for churches to refuse to submit to the communist government's demand for control over their ministries. When an official told him he must renounce his sermon, he replied, "No sir! I won't do that!"

The official was surprised that anyone would respond so forcefully to the secret police, said, "Aren't you aware that I can use force against you?"

"Sir, let me explain that to you," Ton said. "You see, your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. You know that my sermons are spread all over the country on tapes. When you kill me, I only sprinkle them with my blood. They will speak ten times louder after that because everybody will say, 'That preacher meant it because he sealed it with his blood.' So go on, kill me. When you kill me, I win the supreme victory." The secret police released him, knowing his martyrdom would be far more of a problem than his sermon.

-Courage will make you commit to some powerful things that the world can never understand.

-In the book, *The Calling*, Brother Andrew tells a story about the underground church in China.

We were planning to smuggle one million Bibles into China. Wanting to be sure that the believers in the country realized the immensity of the task and were willing to accept the risks, we sent Joseph, a Chinese team member to meet with five key leaders of the house-church movement.

"Do you know how much space one million Bibles take up?" Joseph asked.

"We have already prepared storage places," they replied.

"Do you know what could happen to you," Joseph continued, "if you were caught even with a portion of these Bibles?"

"Joseph, all five of us have been in prison for the Lord," they replied. "All together, we've spent seventy-two years in jail for Jesus. We are willing to die if it means that a million brothers and sisters can have a copy of God's Word."

With tears in his eyes, Joseph folded up his long list of questions and put it away.

-Whether it is risking our life or risking our reputation, serving the Gospel requires courage. God never said his work was safe.

### III. NICODEMUS

-The two very short verses in John 19 concerning Nicodemus comes to us as the high watermark in the life of this devoted man.

-We find Nicodemus in the Gospel of John in three places.

· **John 3**—He is a man who stalks Jesus under the cover of inky, midnight darkness. He is fearful of exposure but hungry enough to fight his fear.

· **John 7**—He is in the council chambers of the religious royalty and he defends Jesus and then has to weather the storm of criticism from his colleagues.

· **John 19**—He is on the way to Calvary along with another man of great position, Joseph of Arimathea. Perhaps they are the only two with any courage left in them.

#### A. Courage Has Its Progression

-When look into those three scenes that John records of Nicodemus, you catch a glimpse into the heart of a good man. It appears that early on there was a hunger for God but there was a challenge at expressing it openly.

-His hungry heart had entertained questions and objections as to who Jesus was and what he was really about. Yet Nicodemus had that great discovery that every hungry soul that approaches God will have to contend with some enemies who want to hinder it.

-Here Nicodemus was, a great Pharisee, a doctor of the law, having to contemplate the idea that he had been wrong about some things concerning this man from Galilee. That was the hardest hill to climb but when he sought him out at night, there was a spiritual courage that began to come to life in him.

-Then he gets into the council chambers where all of his associates began to rail on Jesus and before Nicodemus can stop it, the words leap from his mouth. . .

*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*

-Those words start the unraveling of his secrecy. Now the Pharisees will be looking toward him with a hint of suspicion because of his seeming defense of Jesus.

-But what was it that happened between the council chamber and Nicodemus rushing to Golgotha to take Jesus to the grave?

-The Cross! It was the Cross that pulled Nicodemus from that state of being a secret disciple. He had gotten a vision of a crucified Savior and it had made all the difference in the world.

-There is a courage that comes from the Cross that is an unending reservoir of power. Courage is lost when we lose sight of the Cross.

· The Cross is a declaration of our redemption from sin.

· The Cross is proof of God's love for His church.

· The Cross is a call to a greater discipleship that makes men more than converts but true saints.

## B. The Power of the Cross

**Thomas Manton**—The first day that we begin to be Christians we must reckon with the Cross. . . . As porters stand in the street waiting for a burden for them to carry if they be hired to it, so must a Christian be prepared to take up his burden if God call him to it.

-Every man who is willing to take up his cross will find immeasurable power and courage coming to him because of it.

### 1. Faithfulness

-There is a blessing of faithfulness that comes to us when we are willing to bear the cross. Suddenly the whole matter is bigger than just us. The ability to shoulder the cross causes us to lean into the task and by doing it a whole new world is opened up to us.

-You may ask what I mean by bearing a cross?

- It could be resisting the urge to give up because you know what damage it would do to others.
- It could be fighting off the darkness that threatens to capsize your soul.
- It could be going again in prayer even though you haven't seen an answer yet.
- It could be struggling against the guilt and regret of past mistakes.
- It could be a battle to forgive when you have been wrongly mistreated.
- It could be wondering how much longer you have to be patient with your circumstances.
- It could be facing people who have taken advantage of your kindness on a regular basis.
- It could be grappling with dreams that haven't come to pass.
- It could be accepting a life that did not turn out like you anticipated it would.

-But in working with all of these "crosses" and going about the various responsibilities of life there is a faithfulness to God that is developed.

- You have to give yourself to private prayer because of the struggle.
- You show up for corporate worship because there is a force that fills your soul when you do.
- You seek out things in the Word of God to sustain you in the fight.
- You pursue God because the cross is heavy!

-The Cross inspires faithfulness!

### 2. Patience

-Nicodemus had no idea when it would all work out like Jesus had said it would but he kept on marching. Just in that weekly walking there was a patience that developed in his soul.

-You can wear the enemy out with patience. What will the enemy do with a man who is patient?

- When he slaps at you, you keep on!
- When he knocks you down, you keep on!
- When he tries to sap your inspiration, you keep on!
- When he hinders your prayer, you keep on!
- When he sends in oppressive spirits, you keep on!
- When he attacks from the blind-side, you keep on!

**Isaiah 30:15 KJV** For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength. . . .

**Isaiah 7:4 KJV** And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted. . . .

**Isaiah 26:3 KJV** Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

**Isaiah 40:31 KJV** But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

-The courage of the Cross will give you patience in the most difficult of situations.

### 3. Joy

-The courage of the Cross brings faithfulness and patience. Obviously these are not the only things that the Cross brings but just a portion.

-If there is one other thing that has to be restored to us through the Cross, it ought to be an old-fashioned outpouring of joy.

**Nehemiah 8:9-10 KJV** And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day *is* holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. **[10]** Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this* day *is* holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD *is* your strength.

**Nehemiah 8:12 KJV** And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

-Why was their joy being restored? Because ninety years had gone by since those first exiles had been able to keep the feast around the altar without a temple. It had now been restored back to them.

-The oldest of these people had never been able to worship with the waving of the branches of the myrtle, the pine, and the palm. Ezra had refused

to invent those festive emblems in Babylon, he had maintained a devotion in his soul that refused to counterfeit a system of worship there.

-If you read down through the rest of Nehemiah 8 and continue on through 11. But when you look back at Nehemiah 7:73 through 10:39 you will find that Ezra's preaching brought on an outbreak of revival among the people.

-That Word ushered in a joy that caused them to worship with joy at the Temple.

- No longer exiles.
- No longer prisoners.
- No longer bound with chains.
- No longer under the rule of a dictator.

-If ever we needed to understand our true identity, it is now! There must be an outbreak of old-fashioned joyful worship!

#### **IV. CONCLUSION—THIS DAY WE FIGHT!**

A number of years ago when I was still full-time at the hospital, one of the physicians I worked with (Dr. Turner) recommended that I read J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It is a huge book to read but he told me that he thought that there might be some spiritual undertones that I would appreciate. He was right!

Tolkien, an Englishman, was a peer of C. S. Lewis and while Lewis was writing his *Chronicles of Narnia*, Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. Even though Tolkien denied that his book had anything to do with World War II much of his book appears to have been influenced by it. He wrote it during those war years.

The book is a metaphor for all time because it speaks to the conflict of good against evil. It has the ability to point out the role of common men who find uncommon valor and strength pouring out of their souls. They choose to fight against the wickedness of the dark forces of evil.

There is a part in the book where Aragorn attempts to inspire his hopelessly outnumbered men against what appears to be a sure defeat. Hell's swarming legions have amassed before them and the courage of Aragorn's army is seeping out of their soul.

As he rides along the front lines of his much smaller force of men, he shouts to them:

*I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of friendship. But it is not this day. . . This day we fight! By all that you hold dear on this good earth, I bid you stand, men of the West!*

-They went on to rout the much larger army that day to set the kingdom back in order.

-I am urging you as a church to do the same thing. . . The courage that came to Nicodemus because of the power of the Cross was not something that was limited to the first century. There is a prevailing courage that comes from the Cross that will sustain us.

-For years we have fought on, soldiered on, slogged on, prayed on, worshiped on, and pressed on and I feel something in my soul that is new. . .

- It is a freshness of anointing.
- It is a concentration of the power of the Holy Ghost.
- It is a confrontation in a holy realm that I feel a turning.
- It is a hope that God is going to prevail as He never has before.
- It is an authority of willingness to see God move as never before.

-Let the courage of the Cross sustain you!