

Be Courageous

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 June 2014

Preacher: Jeremy Balfour

[0 : 00] I have to confess, for those of you who ever sit near me in a church service, I am completely and utterly tone deaf.

My knowledge of music is very, very limited. In fact, I hardly know any music at all. I just don't ever listen to it.

But when I do, normally the music I listen to reminds me of a situation or a time or an incident in my life.

And that's the good thing about music. I'm a wee bit disappointed this morning that Neil DM's not here because I was in fact going to get Neil and Philip to come up and do a song with me.

Because if you go back 24 years ago, I know you find it hard to believe that Philip can go back 24 years ago. But if you go back 24 years ago, you would have seen a very young Philip, a wee bit older Neil DM and a bit older me, singing, Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you.

[1 : 09] And if you were a Christian 25 years ago and went to any youth event, that was the song you sang with the actions. And I thought Philip was going to play over there, I thought I was going to be excited.

And it takes me back to a small room or fairly large room in a church here in Edinburgh where we did Crusaders.

But as I think of that song and the quite dramatic words that are in that song, and as I think over the last 25 years, I wonder to myself, how bold, how strong, how courageous have I been in my Christian life?

And I also wonder, what does God want me to be courageous about? What are the things that we're told to be courageous on?

Paul tells the church that they are to fight the good fight, that we are to put on the armour of God, that we are in a struggle not only against human flesh but against spirituality, against the evil one.

[2 : 29] And so what am I meant to be courageous about? Well what I want us to do this morning, just for a few moments, is to look at I think some of the things we can see from scripture that we're called to be courageous about.

The first thing, and if you have a Bible, if you jump all the way back to Genesis and shout it to 22, you'll see a story that perhaps is very well known to us.

Abraham, who was going to be the great, great, great grandfather, who was going to be the start of the nation, is an elderly man.

He's waited many years to have a son. And now he has this son, this young man, and we read this dramatic story of God testing Abraham.

If you look at verse 1, some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

[3 : 45] And God said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice in there is a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.

And as we know, the story develops and they climb this mountain with firewood, with a knife, with everything ready for the sacrifice, except they don't have the sacrificial animal.

And they build the altar. And in a remarkable step of faith, Isaac asked Abraham, his father, where is the animal we're going to sacrifice?

And Abraham says, God will provide it. And just before he takes the knife and to kill his son to sacrifice his son, God intervenes and tells him and provides for him.

And the sacrifice is made. Abraham was courageous in hearing God and doing what God wanted him to do.

[5 : 03] And can I suggest that if we are Bible believing Christians, we need to have the same heart, the same ears, the same attitude.

Now I'm absolutely confident God's not going to call you to do what you called Abraham to do. That was a different time, a different culture. But I am confident that God is going to speak to you through his word, through prayer, through other people.

And the question is, am I courageous enough to do it? You see, often we say, well, I don't know what God wants me to do.

But actually, if we read scripture, a lot of what God reveals to us is what he wants us to do in the basics.

It's to be people who are holy, who are different because we know the living God. We are people who love the Lord the God with everything that we have, that all that we are, we love God with.

[6 : 12] We are to be people who love our neighbours as we love ourselves, to be so radically different in our lifestyles that we are different from the people that we live around.

And that takes courage to do that in Edinburgh in the 21st century. I know from my own life how often I fail at doing that.

And when I am courageous in the small things, in the things that I know God wants me to do, and my courageous standing up for God.

You know the story, if there was a trial tomorrow in Edinburgh's Sheriff's Court, would there be enough evidence to convict me of being a Christian or not?

And my courageous in the way that I share my faith, the way that I stand up for God in the marketplace of life.

[7 : 30] But the second area I want us to think about is courageousness in looking at sin. If you've got your Bible, come with me onto Genesis 39.

Then this is a very well known Old Testament story. Joseph, the spoiled brat of the family, the person with the coat of many colours, had been taken by his brothers and sold into slavery.

Joseph has done well. He's moved up the ranks within the House of Potiphar. He is a good-looking young man and Potiphar's wife starts to take an unhealthy interest in him.

And Joseph is aware of that and acknowledges that. And just when Potiphar's wife wants to do something immoral with him, look at verse 12.

She caught him by his cloak and said, come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

[8 : 53] Joseph looked at sin very seriously. He realised that he was in a difficult place. He didn't hang around and try to negotiate with her.

He didn't hang around and have a polite conversation. He ran away. In fact, the translation is stronger than that. He fled away.

He did a quick run. He didn't want to be in that situation because he knew that what might have happened next was sinful and wrong.

It would have been so easy for him just to go along with the flow. He was away from his people. He was a young man. It would have been so easy just to do it.

But scripture says he fled from sin. I wonder as I look at my life, as you look at your life, how do you see sin?

[9 : 59] I think others here are better to judge than I, but we have swings within the church of going one way and then perhaps swinging back the other way. I suspect at the moment there is a danger that we have swung away from seeing sin as God sees sin in its oddness and in its destruction and in its pain.

We sometimes can see sin as something, well, it's just part of life. It's just something we have to accept.

Or perhaps we kind of put sin within certain divisions. With that sin, that's a premier league sin. That sin, where that's just a voxel league sin.

It doesn't really matter so much. But from God's eye, from God's perspective, sin is sin.

Sin is bad. Sin is ugly. Sin is destructive. You see, there's nothing wrong in being tempted.

[11 : 10] Christ Himself, we read of His temptations at the start of His earthly ministry. But I wonder, do we sometimes play with sin?

We look at something that we know is not that helpful. We see something on television and rather than fleeing, rather than switching it off immediately, we just let it linger.

For each of us, we will know our Achilles heel, where the devil can get at us, where he can bring us down. If we want to be courageous in our Christian life, if we want to follow Christ in a courageous way, then can I suggest we need to deal with sin courageously and have nothing to do with it? Because sin is like cancer. It grows and it spreads so quickly. It can bring so much disharmony individually into families, into churches, into communities.

And that's why we're called to flee, to run from sin. But the third thing I want to suggest that we need to be courageous about is in forgiving and receiving forgiveness.

[12:37] Again, if you can jump with me back to the passage that we read just a few moments ago in John chapter 21.

This is a remarkable story. Again very well known to many of us. Peter, the big mouth.

I did one of these, what's it called on Facebook, you do these different tests. I ended up with Peter as the disciple I was most like. Because he's big mouth.

He speaks before he thinks. But actually he does generally most of the time want to do what is right. But just a few days ago, he's got it completely wrong. He was the one that said, whatever happens, I will never leave you.

[13:35] Even if you go through so much suffering Jesus, even if everybody else turns against you, I'll stand beside you.

And what happens just a few hours later on three occasions, Peter betrays Christ.

And for the next few days, he's a broken man. He wonders, Advocate, can I ever have a relationship with Jesus again?

Yes, he's seen Jesus. He knows he's alive. But he's not had a face to face encounter with him yet.

And here within John 21, Jesus does something remarkable. If you go back and see when Peter was called, this is almost a mirror image of the same story.

[14:41] Three years on, we're back on a beach, we're back collecting fish, and we're coming to Peter's restoration.

You see, Jesus, in many ways, he would have been absolutely right. Just to say, well, you had your chance, you had three years teaching, you've been with me for three years, you blew it, you failed your exam, I've got nothing else to do with you.

But instead, very gently and very lovingly, he restores Peter and forgives Peter and sets him back on the road again.

Interesting, if you read John 21 in the original Greek, as you'll be aware, perhaps there are different words for the word love.

We only have one in English. And the first time Jesus asked this question, it's almost like a kind of brotherly love. It's not the fool McCoy, and it takes the third time of asking for Jesus really to lay it on the line for Peter.

[16:01] I wonder, have you been able to forgive in your Christian life? So how long you've been a Christian, perhaps very recently, perhaps for many years.

And perhaps only you really know what's in your heart. But perhaps something happened many years ago, or perhaps just very recently, and you've never really been able to forgive.

Forgiveness, true forgiveness, is never easy. It's never, it doesn't come without a cost.

But again, if we want to be courageous in our Christian life, we need to be able to forgive. I wonder, do you need to forgive someone before God this morning?

Do you need to phone someone up this afternoon, send an email, write a letter, and say to somebody, for an incident that happened in the past or recently, I forgive you for what happened.

[17:26] How we respond to that is between them and God. But our responsibility is to forgive. Or do you have to receive, do you have to accept forgiveness?

Perhaps someone's come to you and asked for forgiveness. Have we accepted it? Have we truly embraced it and taken it on board?

Courageous to be able to forgive and also to accept forgiveness. But as I say this, there's a real danger that you and I walk out of this place just feeling guilty this morning.

We say, well actually, I look at my life and I just can't reach any of that standard. You set the bar way too high.

Or you say, well I'm going to go out and tomorrow morning, I'm really going to do something that God wants me to do. Or I'm really going to try to be hardest not to get into sin.

[18 : 35] And let me say this is not a self-help group. This is not a book to say you must do better. Because ultimately you and I cannot do it.

Let me finish with another incident from Peter's life. You see Peter, as we've just talked about, betrayed Christ.

Even amongst a young girl, probably only about 10 or 11, he was so scared that even in front of her, he said no to Jesus.

Jump with me to the book of Acts. I'm a start of Acts. Jump to chapter 2, verse 14.

When Peter stood up with 11, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I have to say.

[19 : 48] And then Peter, throughout chapter 2, goes on to preach the sermon of sermons. He jumped right to the end of chapter 2, verse 41.

Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to the number. That is, think of the number of people that Peter stood up and preached that sermon to.

So what had changed in these few weeks from a man who wouldn't even confront a young lady to somebody who would stand in front of thousands of people and preach that sermon were two things.

He had encountered Christ and he had had a fill-in of a spurt. And if we want to be courageous Christians, it's not about what we do.

It's not about trying to do better. It's not about a self-help group or book. It's about encountering Christ and being open to his spirit working in our lives.

[20 : 55] And again, I look at my life and so often I fail in regard to those things. But if we want to be courageous in what God wants us to do, we want to be courageous in dealing with sin, if we want to be courageous in forgiving others, if we want to be courageous in whatever other area God is prompting us to do, it will only happen when we encounter the living God, ourselves, and when we are filled with his spirit.

Let's come to God in prayer. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word.

Lord, we thank you that it speaks to us exactly where we are and what is going on in our lives. And I pray that you would take what has been helpful this morning and apply it into our lives.

I pray that you would hear what you are saying to us through your spirit. And through the work of your spirit, you would not only help us to hear, but help us to apply it into our lives.

Father, thank you that you don't want to leave us where we are, but you want to keep transforming us and changing us to make us more like our saviour.

[22 : 40] Father, would you help us to live life both in the small things and in the large things, that honour you and glorify you.

And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake and glory. Amen.