

Series: **The Courageous Life** – week 1

CDOBC – beginning on 9/13/15

Today's Title: "**Courage in the Face of Intimidation**"

September 13, 2015 ~ Joshua 1, Judges 6-8

OBJECTIVE: To help give strength and courage to believers to live their faith in today's
– and tomorrow's world.

Opening prayer

To be a Christian and to live the Christian life in 2015 and beyond will require courage.

There has been a shift over the past number of years – a shift in the moral and ethical beliefs and practices of our culture – a shift in the rhetoric in our culture – and a shift in how Christians are viewed in our culture.

We have a 'new normal'.

I'm not a prophet...but I don't see this 'new normal' changing for the better anytime soon.

The need for strength and courage

Illus. - Courage vs. stupidity picture

In the O.T. we read of the nation of Israel finally entering the Promised Land (modern day Israel) after 40 years of wandering in the desert. Moses had mentored and trained Joshua to be the next leader of the nomadic nation, so when Moses dies, Joshua becomes the new leader. Joshua is ready to lead, but the task before him

is overwhelming. Knowing this, God appears to Joshua and says:

Joshua 1:5b-6

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.”

God made it clear to Joshua – I am with you and I won’t leave you!

“Be strong and courageous!”

Then in vs. 7 – “Be strong and courageous”

Then in vs. 9 -

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

We can learn a 2 simple points from these few verses in

Joshua 1:

1. God promises to never leave us.
2. Living for God – and obeying God requires strength and courage. Living out the mission God has placed before you requires courage!

No matter what era of history you live in...

No matter what country you live in...

No matter your age, background, education level, economic level, position of authority – you will need strength and courage to live a life pleasing to God!

Joshua begins well – and ends pretty well – but the people don't.

One of the clear commands the Lord gave the nation of Israel was when they took possession of the Promised Land (Israel), they needed to 'cleansed' the people from the land.

This certainly sounds harsh and unloving, but it was God's judgment on the incredible wickedness of these people and God waited patiently - more than 400 years - waiting for them to repent from their wickedness.

Another reason God gave this command was to protect Israel from the temptations and influences which were so common and entrenched in the land.

(**Gen. 15:16** "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." **Deut. 20:16-18** "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them--the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.")

Instead of obeying God, instead of being courageous, they compromised and failed to obey God's clear command.

We read in Judges 1 the disastrous results of Israel's lack of courage, their compromise and disobedience to God's Word:

1:27 "But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding

settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land.”

1:28 “When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely.”

1:29 “Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them.

1:30 “Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor.”

1:31-32 “Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob, and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land.”

1:33 “Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them.”

1:34 “The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain.”

The point is clear – the people of Israel lacked the courage necessary to follow through and they failed to obey God.

Then, in chapter 2, the Angel of the Lord appears before the nation’s leaders and says:

“I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed Me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I

tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be [thorns] in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.”

Judges 2:1-3

The period of the Judges was a very dark time in Israel’s history.

Because the nation of Israel lacked the courage to obey God’s commands, they suffered many years of moral, spiritual and political confusion. The nation was for the most part leaderless – wandering through daily life and they became very apathetic toward the things of God.

In **Judges 2:8** we read of Joshua’s death.

In **vs. 10** we read Joshua’s generation failed to pass on the truth of God and their faith in God to their kids – ***so in one generation the “God IQ” of the nation plummeted to levels of spiritual illiteracy.*** Sound familiar?

In **Judges 3:6** we read of the Israelites intermarrying with the non-believing people of the land and almost immediately the Israelites who did this walked away from God and began to worship the false and demonic gods of their husband/wife.

The end of the book of Judges sums it up this way:

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”

Judges 21:25

Relativism is nothing new – it’s been around as long as people have been rejecting God and embracing their own version of right and wrong!

The period of the Judges was about 3,000 years ago – but it's very similar to our modern culture.

- Relativism is the preferred moral and ethical belief.
- Many who claim to be followers of Christ are not much different than those who deny Christ.
- Moral, spiritual and political confusion reigns. When what is right is called wrong – and what is wrong is called right – the inevitable result will be confusion in all areas of life. The place you should be able to find truth – in the Christian Church – often adds to the confusion. Unfortunately, in many churches the clear message of the cross is being blurred out by the confusing and weak message of those who have no courage to stand against the unbelieving culture.

In this climate – it will take courage to live the Christian life!

We are not Israel. Believers in the United States of America...

- Have not been commanded to wipe out all unbelievers...
- We have not been commanded to build walls around our churches to keep the unbelievers away from us...
- We have not been commanded to measure out judgment on those who practice wickedness.

However...we have been given clear commands of how to live as followers of Christ.

God has given us a clear mission – and just like the infant nation of Israel – He expects us and requires us to obey His clear commands.

- The clear command of God for His Church is to reach people for Christ and then to help them grow in their faith. (Matt. 28:19-20)
- The clear command of God is for believers to love one another.
- His clear command is not only to love other Christians, but we must love our neighbor – anyone we cross paths with. (Luke 10:25 ff)
- In addition to our love, God has clearly commanded us to be holy – to live righteous lives that reflect His truth – His character – and His grace. (Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 1:16)
- God command is very clear – we are to live in the world – but we're called to be very different from the world at the same time! (John 17:14-18)

This is not easy – the clarity of God's commands does not make obedience an easy task – but we have no excuse for not knowing our mission and the spirit in which we should fulfill the mission.

In the current cultural climate we are experiencing in the Western world – if you want to live out your Christian

faith you will face opposition or ridicule in varying degrees of intensity – and I don't see this ending any time soon.

So...just like Joshua was encouraged by the Lord when he was told “Be strong and courageous” – we need to hear the same words, because living as a Christian in modern-day America is no longer an easy task. To live as a Christian in modern-day America you will need to live with a great deal of courage!

Today I am beginning a new series – The Courageous Life – which I hope will help you and encourage you to live your faith with courage!

I want to begin this series by looking at the life of Gideon and what we can learn from his life about having **“Courage in the Face of Fear”**.

Gideon lived during the time of the Judges – a very dark time in Israel's history – and there are some fascinating things we can learn from his life.

We read about Gideon in Judges 6-8 – We don't have time to read through the entire section, so I'm going to point out the key truths that we can learn from Gideon's life experience – and my prayer is these truths will help give us the courage we need to live our faith in today's world.

Turn in your bibles / tap on your device - to Judges 6

Opposition creates a spirit of fear 6:2-3

“Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country.”

Fear is a paralyzing emotion.

Fear will dominate your thoughts, your time and energy because when you're fearful you will do anything to escape your fear!

Gideon – along with the other Israelites in this region were living in fear and they literally abandoned their homes to live in hiding in the caves and clefts of the hills and mountains nearby.

Fear had interrupted their life and they were living as refugees in their own land!

Now there was good reason for them to be fearful.

Every year – probably around harvest time – the Midianites and their partner nations would invade from east of the Jordan River – and destroy both crops and people.

How would you react if you knew a more powerful enemy was going to attack you each year?

In our country – and throughout the world – there seems to be a spirit that is set against those who claim to be Christian.

In various nations around the world – especially in Muslim nations – those who claim to follow Christ are being killed for their faith.

Other Christians in these regions are fleeing their home in order to spare their life and the life of their children.

Newsweek magazine – April 3, 2015 headline:

“Targeting Christians – In the Middle East, Believers are Fleeing or Being Killed”

Many Christians in America don't sense the danger that is rising around them. It's true that in America and the Western world Christians are not being murdered like they are in the Middle East, but the climate toward Christians in the Western world has changed.

Christians – especially evangelical Christians are now often stereotyped as those who are “*stuck in the past*” and “*against change*” or as “*Bible-thumpers, and therefore ignorant, uneducated, backward hicks and rednecks and those with an aversion to or hatred of sex.*”

The new and often accepted bigotry is hatred for Christians for the perceived impediment they are to the progression of society. For some people, being a Christian disqualifies you from holding public office or having some other position of influence.

In fact, MSN commentator Chris Matthews recently suggested, Christians, particularly conservative evangelical Christians, have no place in American politics. He tweeted: *“If you’re a politician and believe in God first, that’s all good. Just don’t run for government office, run for church office.”*

(Source:http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2015/05/persecution_of_christians_in_america_its_not_just_over_there.html)

These things should not be a surprise to us – it shouldn’t cause us to doubt the goodness and sufficiency of the Lord. Jesus was perfectly clear on this point!

John 15:20

“No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.”

John 16:1-3

“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.”

(See also 2 Timothy 3:12)

When an enemy is approaching – the normal, human response is fear.

But if you are a follower of Christ – you are not a ‘normal human’.

You are a new creation in Christ – you have a new life – an eternal life – and you have a new purpose and

mission to your life – which God has empowered you and gifted you to accomplish! We are not called to live in fear!

2 Timothy 1:7

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

Embrace your identity in Christ 6:11-12

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, He said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

The title “mighty warrior” stands out in such contrast because Gideon is hiding in a winepress which he was using to thresh his wheat!

Normally you would thresh wheat on a high point – the ridge on top of the hill where you would be exposed to the wind – after all – when you’re threshing wheat the greatest tool you have is the wind which will separate the wheat from the chaff (dirt / dried pieces of the plant, etc.) when you toss it in the air. Instead – here is Gideon – hiding in the valley – near a cave – in a winepress because he can hide more effectively from the enemy in the valley and in the winepress.

I’m normally a pretty boring driver – I’m not really into cars and horsepower – and I don’t get too

bothered when there's a bunch of traffic. But the other day I was in a hurry – and on my way home everyone was driving 5 mph below the speed limit – in both lanes. I couldn't do anything about it. But...I was impatient and I did my best to pass cars and get home faster than traffic would really allow. And when I 'kind-a' cut someone off – I remembered on my car is a decal – “Canyon Del Oro Baptist Church”.

Instantly I thought of what that person might think about this church if someone who displays a decal from that church drives like that!

This is why my wife refuses to put a decal on her car – so she can never be a bad witness for the church!

Do you ever 'hide' your faith – do you keep quiet and try to stay under the radar to avoid discussions where you may be the only one who believes what you believe?

Charles Stanley:

“Too many Christians have a commitment of convenience. They'll stay faithful as long as it's safe and doesn't involve risk, rejection, or criticism. Instead of standing alone in the face of challenge or temptation, they check to see which way their friends are going.”

(Source: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/c/charles_stanley.html#vtbW4H2yoBKWEiYg.99)

God didn't save you so you could hide your faith – so you could be a covert Christian. Nobody lights a candle and covers it up – a city on a hill cannot be hidden – salt has a purpose – light is only a blessing when it shines in darkness (Matt. 5:13-16).

As a Christian, we're supposed to live our faith with courage – even if the enemy is lurking!

Gideon is called “mighty warrior” because in God's eyes – that's exactly what he was – or what he would be. God had plans for him and they didn't include threshing wheat in a winepress!

In the N.T., believers in Jesus are called “overcomers” and our future destiny is to rule and reign with Christ!

John 16:33

“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

1 John 5:5

“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

Romans 8:37

“...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

- ESPN announcer Chris Broussard's statements about immoral behavior by certain athletes who claim to be Christians... (<http://www.breitbart.com/big-journalism/2013/04/29/espn-apologizes-broussard/>)
- Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson's faith in Christ

- Retired NFL quarterback Kurt Warner, Former NFL Coach and TV Commentator Tony Dungy and aspiring NFL player Tim Tebow – all speak openly about their faith in Jesus Christ.
- NBA’s MVP Steph Curry defied the NBA’s request for him to keep silent about his faith in Christ in his MVP acceptance speech.
- Russell Wilson says he and Ciara will not have sex until they are married – was mocked and ridiculed in the media for this...
- Chick-fil-A / Hobby Lobby – all stores closed on Sunday.

It takes courage to take a public stand for your faith when you know the ridicule and degrading comments are sure to follow.

We are not alone in our mission 6:14-16

The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?”

“But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”

God is with you...always...forever!

Joshua 1:5b-6

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Judges 6:16

“The LORD answered, “I will be with you...”

Matthew 28:20b

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Other believers are with you.

Later on in the account of Gideon we read of 35,000 soldiers that lined up to fight with Gideon. He wasn't alone. When he gained the courage to follow God's plan – others stood by his side!

Apply it...

Understand fear – but do not be led by your fear.

We only have 2 fears when we are born – fear of falling and fear of loud noises. Everything else we're afraid of we've learned to be afraid of – which means they can be unlearned and defeated! God has not called you to be fearful – He's called you to be courageous!

Understand your identity in Christ!

You are a “mighty warrior” – “overcomer” – “child of the King”!

You have not lost – you are not defeated – you will rule and reign with Christ!

The power within you is greater than the power of Satan – live in the victory of Christ – it's your victory also!

You are not alone – Jesus is always with you
We have strength in numbers – we find courage when we're not alone.
Jesus has promised to always be with you.
Other believers are with you.
Stand tall – be strong – be of good courage.

Isaiah 41:10

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Close in prayer