

Courage vs. Fear

Seen on a wall sign in a local Newport News restaurant:

“Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway!”

Mark 10:32-34

³²Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. (NIV: astonished and afraid) Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: ³³“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; ³⁴and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” [NKJV]

In drawing near Jerusalem, the disciples sensed the danger of their mission. Jesus was a wanted man and yet He was going before them.

- The disciples were amazed at the courage of Jesus.
- Yet they were afraid of the fate awaiting them in Jerusalem.
Jesus was brave enough to walk straight toward His fate of the cross and went leading the way in front of the disciples.
- We don't think about the courage of Jesus. It took a tremendous amount of bravery for Him to walk straight towards His fate at Calvary and to lead the way for His disciples.

**The courage of Jesus is especially amazing in light of
our frequent cowardice as Christians, afraid to stand out for Jesus.
He wasn't afraid to stand out for us!**

Matthew 10:39 ***Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for My sake will find it.*** [NIV]

- Antithetical to the world's way of thinking, Jesus' words hinge on the contrast between the earthly life and the heavenly life.

Matthew 10:34 ***Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.***

- Jesus' message will create division; this "sword" will divide the world into those who believe in Him and those who do not. His arrival will bring great conflict as those who reject Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God will turn in hatred against those who hear and believe; even in one's own household.

Even in the midst of persecution, Jesus' disciples should not fear but be bold in their proclamation of the gospel.

Matthew 10: 26, 28 ²⁶**Therefore do not fear them. ...** ²⁸**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** [NKJV]

- God is the one to fear, not the men who persecute the followers of Jesus.
- The worst they can do is to destroy the body, but being a coward before God can have eternal consequences.

Proverbs 29:25 **Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.** [NIV]

Jesus was preparing the disciples for the physical persecution that would follow His Resurrection.

Luke 21:12-13 ¹²**But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.** ¹³**But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.** [NKJV]

Paul's commitment:

Acts 21:12-13 ¹²**Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.** ¹³**Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.** [NKJV]

Acts 8:1 ... **At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.** [NKJV]

They would be beaten, stoned, flogged, and imprisoned.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 ²⁴**From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.** ²⁵**Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;** ²⁶**in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;** ²⁷**in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—** [NKJV]

Many of them would be killed. Yet He warned them not to let the fear of man stop them from proclaiming the gospel. Even though His followers would undergo tremendous physical suffering for His sake, the trials would be brief and temporary. 2 Corinthians 4:17 ***For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, [NKJV]***

The expectation as a believer in Jesus is to take up your cross daily and follow Him.

Matthew 16:24 ***Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” [NKJV]***

Many people interpret the “cross” to be taken up as some burden that they must carry in their lives:

- A strained relationship
- A thankless job
- A physical illness
- With self-pitying pride, they look at their difficulty and say, “This is my cross I have to carry.”

When a person carried a cross in Jesus’ day, it wasn’t thought of as just a persistent annoyance or burden. To a person in the first century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only:

**Death By Crucifixion!
The Cross is a one-way ticket to dying to self!**

Jesus’ command to “take up your cross and follow Me” is a call to self-abasement and self-sacrifice. One must be willing to die to follow Jesus.

Dying to self is absolute surrender to God.

Jesus’ attempts to dissuade people from following Him limited the number of false converts and insincere disciples –

John 6:66 ***From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. [NKJV]***

God seeks true worshipers who will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Jesus’ call to “take up your cross and follow Me” serves to screen out the disingenuous, double-minded.

Are you ready to take up your cross and follow Jesus?

Consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your closest friends?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your reputation?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your job?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?

Notice the phrasing of the questions: **“Are you willing?”**

Following Jesus doesn't necessarily mean all these things will happen to you, but the disciple of Christ must be willing to suffer loss. Are you willing to take up your cross?

If faced with a choice—Jesus or the comforts of this life—which will you choose?

Abraham became willing to sacrifice his beloved and promised son – Isaac.
Hannah gave Samuel to the priesthood to fulfill her oath to the Lord for a son.

Only **IF** you willingly take up your cross **THEN** you may be called His disciple.

Luke 14:27 ***And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*** [NKJV]

The reward is worth the price. Remember that, as Jesus called His disciples to “take up your cross and follow Me,” He also bore a cross.

As much as a person wearing a cross is making a statement of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of their life; please be aware:

The Cross is a 1-way ticket to crucifixion!

Reward for following Him:

Peter asked what they would receive for leaving all to follow Him in Matthew 19:27-30

²⁷Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” ²⁸Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. [NIV]

Psalm 46:1-2a, 7, 10-11

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore, we will not fear...

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

¹⁰Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The Lord of hosts = The word hosts is a translation of the Hebrew word *sabaoth*, meaning “**armies**”—a reference to any army, spiritual or earthly.

The name Lord of hosts emphasizes God’s sovereign control over every power, dominion, force, and realm.

God is the leader of Heaven’s army that is committed to assist us in the battles we face against the sin and corruption of this world.