

COURAGEOUS

2000 years ago when God needed a man to change the world;
when he needed a man who would do what others could not do;
when he needed a man who would not run or hide;
when he needed a man with the strength to speak truth to power
and the compassion to care for the weak;
when he needed a man who would refuse the prizes of the world
and who would resist the passions of the flesh;
He sent Jesus.

He sent a man who so threatened the powerbrokers of the day
that they conspired to put him to death.

And for two thousand years
he has been the most compelling personality the world has ever known.
For two thousand years
he has brought the powerful to their knees,
and he has caused the lowly to rise up and stand.

For two thousand years the life of Jesus
has been the most powerful force on earth.
His teachings and his example have inspired
more acts of kindness,
more social reform for the good of women and children around the world
and more hope and strength for the impoverished and the oppressed
than the rest of history's teachers put together.

For two thousand years Jesus has been the man
who has spoken so powerfully to the depths of the human heart
that men of every class and culture and color
have been able to understand their own stories by looking at his.

For two thousand years
men who have wanted their lives to count

and to be more than they are,
have turned to him as their MasterTeacher
and they have followed him.
Over the past seven weeks we have looked at various reasons
why Jesus lived the most impactful, incredible life the world has ever seen.
And why men have been willing to follow him.

The final reason we will look at is this:
Jesus was courageous.

He came here to change the world.
And he knew there would be a price to pay.
Rejection,
persecution,
scourging,
crucifixion.
None of this surprised him.

He didn't make a few mistakes along the way,
find himself in over his head, and
not know how to get out of a bad situations.
Events didn't over take him.
Things didn't get away from him.

Read the story.
He knew what was going to happen.
He told his disciples he was going to be crucified.
And when the time came,
the time he wanted,
he purposefully marched into Jerusalem,
riding on the back of a donkey,
proclaiming himself to be the Messiah, and
he claimed authority over the Temple,
and those who ran it.

He committed the most provocative acts he could imagine
to make sure his crucifixion would occur.

When Pilate gave him a way out,
he refused to take it.

When his disciples wanted to save him, he told them,
“If I wanted to escape,
I would call upon the Father
and he would send twelve legions of angels.
I choose the cross.

And when the moment came,
he bore its agony with such character and strength,
that a Roman centurion who would have seen many soldiers die in war
spoke these words, “Surely, this man was the Son of God.”

The horror of a Roman crucifixion is more than we can fathom.
It was such a brutal form of execution
that it was not discussed in good Roman homes.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the horrors of crucifixion were so great
that the cross became they symbol of the Christian faith
only after everyone who had witnessed an actual crucifixion had died.

Twelve average men who would later change the world,
and die martyrs’ deaths themselves,
proclaiming his message,
did not leave their families and their professions
and give their lives because Jesus was a nice guy.

Men don’t follow nice.

They follow integrity,
they follow strength,
they follow passion, and
they follow courage.
It has always been that way and it will always be that way.

As William Wallace said to Robert the Bruce in Braveheart.
“Men don’t follow titles, they follow courage.”

Why did Jesus change the world?

Because he was courageous.
And if we are to be like our MasterTeacher,
we must be courageous, as well.
Few of us will be called to display physical courage.
Some of us may be.
Some of you have been.

To protect those you love,
to defend the weak,
to fight for our country.
Some of you have displayed the physical courage
that men admire.
The kind of courage that Jesus possessed
when he faced the cross.

But all of us will have to exhibit moral courage
if we are to follow him.

The difference?

Physical courage: bravery in the face of physical threats or pain.

Moral courage: doing what's right in the face of popular opposition, personal vilification, threats of social or material loss, or discouragement.

Moral courage involves things like:

Refusing to go along at work with something you believe to be wrong,
even if means you might lose your job or miss out on a promotion.

Speaking the truth when everyone in the room will think you a fool.

Being willing to see evil for what it is instead of turning a blind eye,
knowing that if you call it evil you can no longer be neutral and must act.

Let's look at the courage of Jesus
and see how it applies to us.

JESUS WAS COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO

1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OWN LIFE.

John 10.11-12, 18: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks

them and scatters the flock. ... No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again.

No one takes my life from me.
I know what I am called to do.
I know that if I am faithful,
there will be a cost to pay.

I will not complain that it's hard.
I will not blame others for the choices I make.
I will not play the victim
or ask for your sympathy.

I will fulfill my mission,
do the Father's will,
care for those who have been entrusted to me.
And I will be the man I was meant to be.

No one takes my life from me.
I give it.
I sacrifice it.
I am responsible for my choices.
I am responsible for my destiny.
No one else.

The willingness to take responsibility for ourselves.
It's what makes us men.

You can be a man when you're 10 or 12.
If at that age,
you decide that you are responsible for the choices you make

and the life you live.

You can be a child at 50 or 60
if you choose to blame your life on
your parents,
your circumstances,
other people,
the economy, or
fate.

Ask guys
why they still have a problem with anger,
why they still don't have a daily time with God,
why they drink too much,
why they are drifting apart from their wives
and don't relate well to their kids,
why they don't tithe or
why they aren't living a missional life.
Ask them why they aren't the man they were meant to be.

And they usually have a reason.

I work long hours.
My job puts me under a lot of stress.
I married the wrong woman.
My father wasn't there for me when I was growing up.
Anger runs in my family.
Money's tight.

And all of a sudden
they're not responsible for who they are and what they do.
Their job is,
their wife is,
their past is,
their genetic make-up is.
Anything and everything but themselves.

I know you guys are stressed out at work.
I know some of you had a really tough time growing up.
Some of you have wives that don't appreciate you
and kids who take you for granted.
I know you come home dead tired.

But once we say those things are responsible for where we are
emotionally and spiritually,
then we are no longer responsible
for our choices or our growth or our lives.
We give away our power to take charge of our lives,
and we will never become the men we were meant to be.

It takes courage to say,
no one takes my life from me.
I am responsible for where I am
and for where I go from here.
Not my parents, not my wife, not my boss, not my past.

Guys all around you are growing.
Guys all around you are changing.
Guys all around you are changing their priorities,
discovering their mission, and
finding a way to serve.
Guys all around you are becoming more like their MasterTeacher Jesus.

And it takes courage.
To believe you can change,
to change your priorities,
to try something you may fail at,
to take up a cross and pay a price –
it takes courage.

But it's the only way to become the man you were meant to be.

Two – JESUS WAS COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO

2. DREAM BIG.

It takes courage to dream big.
To believe you can make a difference.

You look at the world
and you see its enormity;
you realize how long things have been the way they are
and all the interests that want to keep them that way;
you consider how flawed and fallen you are
and it seems foolish to believe that you can make the world a better place.

And to step into the arena
and take up arms –
who would do that?

Someone who is absolutely crazy.
Or someone who is courageous enough
to want to be like his MasterTeacher Jesus.

Jesus dreamed big.
He dreamed he would change the world.

One of my favorite passages,
we've looked at it before in this series.

Here's Jesus announcing his mission statement.

Luke 4.16-21: He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

In case you need a translation,

Jesus is saying here:

I am going to change the world.

By the time I'm through:

Lives will be better.

People will be free.

The hurting will be healed.

The poor will have hope.

This world will be more the way God wants it to be
because of my time on this planet.

It can be hard to believe that one man can change the world.

But it seems absolutely preposterous to believe that you can be that one man.

What does it take to look the preposterous in the face and call it a liar?

It takes courage.

To say, I don't know how,

but I will be that man.

I dedicate myself to being a man

who makes the world better for somebody else.

I don't know all that much.

I'm half a mess myself.

I'm full of self-doubts and fears.

And I don't have the greatest track record of success.

But it's in my heart to be like Jesus and make a difference.

So, by God's grace I will be that man.

What does it take to say that and to live that?

Courage.

To believe that the future is not set.

To decide that tomorrow does not have to be like today.

To determine that that you are on this planet

to dream a God-given dream and

to fight a battle that will in some way bring God's Kingdom into the world.

That takes courage.

To decide that one day, looking back on your life,
you will be able to say:

“My eyes were open,
my heart was full,
my hands were busy,
and here’s the difference I made
because I knew that being the man I was meant to be
meant more than going to church and being a good guy.
It meant being like Jesus and
trying to make this world better for those God loves.

That takes courage.

But if you could live that way,
why would you live any other way?

The founder of the Methodist Movement John Wesley once said:

John Wesley: Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.

Wesley says it won’t take many to change the world.
But it will take courage.
It will take men who fear nothing but sin
and want nothing but God.

Men who do great things for God –
we look up to them
and admire them.
And so we should.

But we shouldn’t idolize them
or make them into something they’re not.

Everyone is ordinary until he does something extraordinary.
Everyone is just one of the guys until he
wants more,
believes more,
tries more.

Then he's a great man.
But he was once you.
He was once me.
He was once just some guy
who had a decision to make.
Will I settle for being who I am and doing what I've done,
or will I dream big and change the world?
That's the same decision that every one of us faces.
That's the same decision that will determine
who we become and what we do.

Dwight L. Moody was the Billy Graham of the 19th century.
By the time his life was over,
he had preached before millions in the U.S. and in Europe
and had led thousands to faith in Christ.

He was a most unlikely candidate.
His father, a small farmer and stone mason,
was an alcoholic and died at the age of 41
when Dwight was only four years old.

His mother struggled to support her nine children.
Dwight and some of the others had to be sent away to live with others
and to work for their room and board.
His education totaled 7 grades in a one room school house.
Even after he became a well-known evangelist,
he was often criticized for his poor grammar.

At the age of 18 he was converted when a Sunday School teacher
went to the shoe store where he worked
and told him how much God loved him.

There may be many reason why God used Moody the way he did,
but one of them was because Moody was committed to doing all that God
called him to do.

He heard a preacher make the following statement.
 “The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in
 and by the man who is fully consecrated to him.”
 Dwight Moody committed himself to being that man.

Everyone is ordinary
 until he says,
 “God, you can have all of me.
 My strength, my talents and my time.
 My fears, my self-doubts and my weaknesses.
 They’re all yours.
 Now, use me to change the world.”

Dream big.
 It takes courage.

You don’t have to dream that you will
 end world hunger or
 convert thousands or
 heal the masses.

But you’ve got to dream
 that God will use you to change somebody’s world.
 One person,
 really changed.
 That’s big.

Be a mentor through Angel Reach
 or through our prison ministry.
 Go on a mission trip to Honduras
 and see where that leads –
 maybe to a band of brothers who your own mission.

Invite a friend to church
 and pray for him until he accepts Christ.
 Listen to a man at work who’s hurting and broken.

Or start a Bible study at your job.
 Be the Sunday School teacher that every third grader at TWUMC
 remembers as the man who made them feel special
 and taught them about Jesus.

God changes the world through men like you
 every day.
 Every day.

He doesn't put limits on what you can do for him.
 You do.
 I do.

Dream big.
 Dream bigger.
 Dream that you can change the world.

Three – JESUS WAS COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO

3. CHALLENGE MEN TO BE GREAT.

If you're a pastor and you've got a gift for gab,
 it doesn't take much courage to get up in front of people
 and tell them what they want to hear.

If you're an evangelist,
 it doesn't require any kind of bravery
 to tell people that God wants to give them everything they desire.

If you're a preacher,
 no nerve is needed to preach an entertaining Gospel
 that leaves people comfortable and in a good humor.

We're told that's exactly what we'll see as the end gets closer.

2 Timothy 4.1-5: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the
 living
 and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this
 charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct,
 rebuke and

encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

They will gather around them **a great number** of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.
 It's not hard to get preachers who get paid by their parishioners to tell them what they want to hear.
 It's not hard to find pastors who lack enough courage to tell people what they need to hear, instead of what they want to hear.

It's a different kind of man who will look other men in the eye and tell them that they have to change.
 That they have to die to themselves, repent of their sins, and take up a cross.

Sometimes it'll get you fired.
 Sometimes it'll get you crucified.

But it's always the right thing to do.
 To tell men that they're living too small, they want too little, and they are going to have to die to themselves and make great sacrifices to become the men they were meant to be.

People might turn you off.
 Stop listening to you.
 Walk away.

And it takes courage not to care
and not to compromise the word of God
that calls men to be truly great.

One thing I admire about Jesus is that there was no bait and switch.
There was no deceit that promised the abundance of life
without right up front telling men what it would require.

William Barclay: Jesus never sought to lure men to him by the offer of an easy way; he sought to challenge them, to waken the sleeping chivalry in their souls, by the offer of a way than which none could be higher and harder. He came not to make life easy but to make men great.

When Jesus called men to follow him,
he told them that following him would be costly.

Luke 14.27-30: And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish."

"Count the cost," Jesus told men who wanted to follow him.

There is a life of true greatness that awaits you.
And I have come to call you to that life.
But greatness comes at a price.

Wanting what everybody else wants.
Doing what everybody else does.
Living like everybody else –
that doesn't make us great.
It just makes us like everybody else.

And Jesus did not die on the cross to make us like everybody else.
He died to make us great.
He died to make us like himself.

Don't settle.
You were made for more.

I'm going to close by telling you a story
I told you three years ago.

It's about a remarkable woman who was born in 1875.
Her name was Mary Bethune.
Both her parents had been slaves.

At the age of 5 she began working in the fields.
But she took an interest in her own education.
And she found a way to attend
a small, one room, segregated schoolhouse in South Carolina.

From there she went to study at Chicago's Moody Bible Institute.
That was a big step, huge,
almost unheard of for a young black woman at that time.
After graduating, she returned to the south and began to teach.
Another big step.
Amazing, really.

But she didn't stop there.

She had a dream.
She felt called to start a college for black students.

She wanted young African Americans to get a quality education.
And she wanted the world to see that
young black men and women could be brilliant and beautiful.
She didn't let the cost stop her.
She didn't let what others said stop her.
She didn't let the fact that she was black or a woman stop her.

She had a vision.
And she discovered that the spirit within her
was not a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power.

In 1904 in Daytona Beach, Florida,
at the age of 29,
Mary Bethune founded what would become Bethune-Cookman University.

Even later she would become an advisor to President Franklin Delano

Roosevelt.

For twenty years as a college president,
 Mary Bethune made the most of her remarkable ability
 to inspire young people to
 dream their own dreams,
 overcome their own obstacles, and
 win their own battles.

At the graduation exercises each year she would charge her students,
 “Faith ought not be a puny thing.
 If you believe, have faith like a giant.
 And may God grant you not peace, but glory.”

I love that last line.

“May God grant you not peace, but glory.”

It was Bethune’s way of saying
 that the battles that matter and the causes that are worthy of our lives
 are rarely accomplished without difficulty, courage and sacrifice.

I think she was telling her students:
 You can live a comfortable life
 or you can live a great life.
 You can live an easy life
 or you can live a glorious life.
 Now, which do you think you were created for?
 Peace – or glory?

You follow Jesus.
 He lived the greatest life the world has ever seen.

He is your MasterTeacher.
 It is your goal in life to be like him.
 That means you are called to live a glorious life.

Take Responsibility for your life.
 Dream Big.
 And determine that you will a life that is truly great.

