

Right Living Makes Courageous Living

Last week I quoted Winston Churchill: “Success is not final failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” The courage to continue is what counts.

Courage, that virtue so prized by peoples around the world, down through the ages is something we all need at some point in our lives. Is courage a rare virtue? I’m continuing in the Book of Proverbs gleaning wisdom that’s there for all. **The proverbs of the Bible teach us how to live life skillfully from God’s point of view.** They cover a wide variety of topics concerning life, morality, ethics and decision-making, and human relations, teaching us how to apply God’s wisdom and morality to life in society.

Today I’m talking about Proverbs 28. There we find several nuggets of wisdom in this proverb of warnings and instructions. Remember that a proverb is a short statement that takes the place of a long explanation. And the foundation for these words of wisdom is this: ***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline, Proverbs 1:7.***

Courage

Proverbs 28 begins, ***The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion, Prov. 28:1.*** Why do the wicked flee and why are the righteous as bold as a lion? It has to do with God and the courage He gives. The wicked know in their heart their wicked deeds and run to hide and cover up. But **the righteous can stand fast in God’s truth, even when in danger or falsely accused.**

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary says this: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” Other definitions say, “the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous.” Most of the popular images of courage are from the battlefield. They have to do with warfare and bloodshed and the crash of armies. I don’t doubt in the least that those acts on the battlefield are part of what courage is all about. But there are other ways to understand courage.

Maybe courage is a family dealing with terminal cancer in a loving and hopeful manner. Or, a single mother raising her family, determined to teach her children what is right and give them opportunity to succeed in life. It is a widow or widower who faces the last years of her/his life without their beloved spouse yet chooses to live life to the full. It is a disabled person struggling with their self-image and feelings of frustration and rejection yet determined to overcome and live a fulfilling and productive life. Perhaps it is a single person who chooses purity over promiscuity; an engaged couple who wait, even though the

world says go ahead. Maybe courage is someone in a large bureaucracy, whether government or business or other organization, who sees something terribly wrong, and has the courage to blow the whistle. It takes courage to get married – make a lifetime commitment. It takes courage to have children – you don't know what will happen. No doubt you can think of others.

The Roman historian Tacitus wrote, “The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise.” Indeed, **it takes courage to step out of our comfort zones.** Dealing with “cancel culture” (viral videos of parents, many of them black, standing up to school boards imposing CRT on their children) takes courage. Nelson Mandela: “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Source of Courage

If we're totally honest with ourselves we'll confess that it takes courage to follow our Lord, because He calls us out of our comfort zones. Someone once said, **“Courage is fear that has said its prayers.”** The Bible actually has quite a bit to say about courage or overcoming fear. For example: ***Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people.... Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go, Joshua 1:6-7.*** Take courage because you are doing what I have commanded, says God. And perhaps **it takes courage to obey God's laws.**

Again, in **Joshua 1:9** it says, ***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.*** Courage comes with God's presence. This same theme is echoed in the Psalms: ***The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1.*** The O.T. prophets reminded God's people that courage came with obedience to God and the assurance of His presence.¹

This is what Jesus meant and what his disciples understood: ***Perfect love drives out fear, 1 John 4:18. With God present, fear is swept away.*** The apostles Paul and Peter understood what Jesus meant.² We were destined as God's people to have courage. ***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline, 2 Timothy 1:7.***

Like wisdom, genuine courage comes from God. I believe God wants us to trust Him in all areas of life and that is what gives us courage. When we take a step for the Lord it moves us from fear to faith.

Wealth

How telling that Proverbs 28, which speaks to courage also talks about wealth. Why is that? Simple: our money is so often a substitute for God. That is, we can easily trust in our wealth to keep us safe, rather than God. ***A rich***

man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out, Prov. 28:11.

We must approach wealth with wisdom and patience. **Proverbs 13:11** says, ***Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it.*** This is one of the most important lessons we can all learn about handling our finances: **steady earning and steady saving bring great rewards over time.**

This is in great contrast to “get rich quick schemes.” He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. ***A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished, Proverbs 28:19-20.*** The most successful way to gain wealth is steady work. Maybe you know Aesop’s fable about the tortoise and the hare.

From God’s point of view generosity is integral to properly handling our money. ***He who gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse, Prov. 28:27.*** There is a big difference between being frugal and being **stingy.** Some of the most generous people I have known were frugal. According to Webster’s Dictionary to be stingy is “unwilling to give or spend; ungenerous.” St. Paul gave this advice to us all: ***As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life, I Timothy 6:17-19.***

Rooted In God’s Word

Those rooted in God’s word will have confidence to face their fears about money, about illnesses, about life in general. ***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight, Prov. 3:5.*** 90% of what we worry about never materializes. We have a little plaque in our kitchen that reminds us: “Worry is like a rocking chair. It keeps you busy but doesn’t get you anywhere.” A wonderful woman in one of my previous churches used to say, “If you’re going to pray why worry. If you’re going to worry why pray.” **With God I can face my fears and find solutions to my problems with tact and common sense.** There is no need to worry.

Rooted in God’s word we will have courage to withstand opposition and intimidation from those who mock our Savior and despise rightful living. We’ll be able to strive with those who mock the law. ***Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive with them, Prov. 28:4.*** Of course, this refers to the covenant law of God, beginning with the Ten Commandments. It is the moral code of living that forms the basis of the laws of our land and communities. I think most of us recognize that we stive with movements and

people who forsake the law. Criminals praise other criminals. ***Evildoers do not understand what is right, but those who seek the LORD understand it fully, Prov. 28:5.*** When people riot, invade and destroy public and private property, they are praising wickedness. I don't understand mayors and district attorneys in various cities who fail to enforce laws. Are they not praising wickedness. Defunding police is a dumb and dangerous idea. You cannot have a cohesive and peaceful society under such circumstances. The same goes for a church. If the agreed upon rules and policies are ignored by leaders, then you cannot have unity. ***He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination, Prov. 28:9.***

Stay rooted in God's word, it will bring you peace. Read the Bible every day ... I hope you're reading through Proverbs this month. ***Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble, Psalm 119:165.***

The Winning Team

If you read the book of Revelation, you will learn how it all ends. When Christ returns there will be a new heaven and earth for the faithful: ***And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away, Rev. 21:3-4.***

An important ingredient of courage and remaining faithful is **remembering whose team you're playing for.** The true believer belongs to Christ. In Him Your fears have already been faced and defeated. ***He who trusts in his own mind is a fool; but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered, Proverbs 28:26.***

On Christ's team we ought to be quite skeptical about allowing ourselves to go along with other teams heading in a different direction. St. Paul said, ***Be not conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, Romans 12:2.*** If you fill your mind with the hope found in the word of God you won't be easily led astray nor have time to wallow in fear. A word to the wise: use caution and discernment about jumping on the latest social justice bandwagon, political movement, or cultural fad. Tzedakah – personal righteousness is essential to justice as commanded by God. Calling ourselves and others to practice justice and compassion in our relationships, comes before demanding “justice” for this or that identity group. It is never easy to swim against the current of cultural movements or those who seem to have all the power. Yet many times we are called to do so, for Christ's sake. The Bible teaches that “right makes might.” ***'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts, Zech. 4:6.*** Better to spend **one day** with courageous faith in God than an entire lifetime walking in fear.

God has given us His Spirit. *For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline, 2 Timothy 1:7.* We can't be losers because we were born anew through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit we will be victorious over the problems, struggles, and trials of life. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we were born for courage, for bravery, for strength, to be overcomers, and to be wise. We're on His teaming, the winning team.

The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion, Prov. 28:1.

¹See Isaiah 51:7; Jeremiah 42:11; Haggai 2:5.

²1 Peter 3:14.