

The Courageous Christ

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[0 : 0 0] if you'll allow me, I want to tell you a story going back nearly a thousand years to a man called Godfrey of Boulogne, Boulogne, Boulogne, French. He was in Antioch.

A siege had been called. He had just captured this castle. It had taken him months to capture this castle. His men had no food, nothing. They finally won the victory. They got into the castle and what happened? There was an Arab reinforcement from behind.

So they got into the castle. All of the stores had been depleted because it had been a long siege, many months. They had wasted away outside on whatever shrub could be found in the desert.

They got in to find the stores emptied and now they were under siege again. This siege had went on now for months. And so what were they to do? Were they to surrender? If they did, they would know the end.

Death to everyone or enslavement at best or probably at worst. So Godfrey called on his men to fast for three days and to only give the food to the horses.

[1 : 3 0] Then everyone, Lord and commoner, marched through the city on barefoot and stopped at every church to call on the Lord's aid. On the morning of June 28th, 1098, there's a quote, everyone received the Lord's Supper, offered themselves up to God to die. So if he should wish, then some 700 knights and another 19,000 men left the gates of Antioch to blurring horns against a force double in size, well fed and relaxed. What happened?

What happened is that historians can't understand it. They won. They went out and won despite this army being smaller, malnourish, starved.

They beat an army, double their size, well fed and relaxed. What happened is that a leader can break or make any army. I believe that in our Western era, we have lost the vision of a mighty Christ, of a mighty God. We have lost the call and honour to his service because we do not see him often as one who would lead. We see him as one who would definitely come alongside us, be with us in trouble and pain, bear us, I agree, but would we follow him?

Would we genuinely follow him? Is he the kind of hero you would bring into the pub round the corner and say, okay men, here's the guy I want you to follow? I think most of us would fall away from that.

And yet, here was a man as mighty as King David, who would cry on his Lord for aid and call his 700 knights and over 19,000 men, except for the 200 who stayed behind to defend the city if they lost, to bend their knee to Christ.

[3 : 4 0] Yet, it couldn't be further from the truth and that is our detriment. We have really lost this vision of Christ and I would say especially the men and young boys. There's almost been this element of Jesus that he is gentle and merciful. He is gentle and lowly and that is so true and I hope to hit on that bit as well tomorrow. But there is another side. He is the leader we are to follow. C.S. Lewis puts it this way, in regarding the young men, and I am very conscious of this, I come from a household of three boys, I have now got three boys of my own, what do I do with them? This is a C.S. Lewis.

Those who say that children must not be frightened may mean two things. They may mean, one, that we must not do anything likely to give the child those haunting, disabling, pathological fears against which ordinary courage is helpless, phobias. His mind must, if possible, be kept clear of things he can't bear to think of. Or they may mean, two, that we must try to keep out of his mind the knowledge that he is born into a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism, and cowardice, good and evil. If they mean the first, I agree with them, but not if they mean the second. The second would indeed be to give children a false impression and feed them on escapism in the bad sense. There is something ludicrous in the idea of so educating a generation which is born to the era of the Soviet state and the atomic bomb. Since it is so likely that they will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage. Otherwise, you're making their destiny not brighter, but darker. To have courage, we must hear stories of courage. And to that end, I want to take you to this tiny wee passage to show you a wee bit about the courageous Christ. Now, we have, I'll break this down three sections because lo and behold, there's three verses. I'm not working with 40 verses here.

First thing, courageous Christ. We know what it is like for a great leader and king. We have them in movies or in our books all the time. The Lord of the Rings, the king leading the charge, Aragon.

Here we have Jesus going up to Jerusalem. He has got his disciples. He has got a crowd, a band of followers coming after him, but yet Jesus was ahead of them. He was leading the charge. Our passage says the disciples were amazed. They were amazed. You might ask, well, why are they amazed? John 11 even says that Thomas, you know, doubting Thomas. Man, he must really hate that. Doubting Thomas says this, let us go also that we may die with him. He really doesn't deserve the name doubting Thomas.

Let us go with him so that we may die with him. I don't know about you. They were not following someone that they would be scared to show to their fishermen friends. Being in Campbelltown, I know a lot of fishermen now. Didn't used to. Used to know a lot of farmers. Now I know farmers and fishermen. Here is someone that this guy was willing to follow to the gates of hell and back, saying, I will go with you even if I die. Okay, right. What's going on here?

[7 : 27] Jesus was going on despite knowing what's coming, and we're going to explore that, but right now Jesus is striving on ahead. The disciples are amazed at him, and the other ones are afraid. Why are they afraid? They're going into enemy territory. They know that Jesus has faced opposition. Some of this group might be tentatively going along with Jesus, going, well, he might be. We've seen him do pretty miraculous things. Those guys up in Galilee wanted to make Jesus king by force. We'll go with him.

Some maybe tentatively. It certainly says that they were afraid. They were afraid of the power of the ruling council in Sanhedrin. They were afraid of the Romans. They were afraid. What trouble could Jesus cause? Yet the disciples, those who are closest to him, were amazed by him. Jesus doesn't sound like someone timid, someone weak, someone filled with fear. Rather, I read stories about the Crusades.

I like history. I like the Crusades. The Crusades are, I like knights. Knights are filled with epic stories, and one of them is Richard the Lionheart. Sometimes you've got to get into history to find stories that are more fiction than fact, or at least feel that way. And there's one of Richard the Lionheart in the Crusades. He was coming by ship to relieve this city called Jaffa, only to find that it had been beaten and destroyed already. Yet, as he sat on his ship with his other armada, he heard the wails of the women, the slaughter of the men, and unable to bear it no more, he alone, king of England, jumps into the water, single-handedly up to his chest. And by the way, he was six foot four.

With a shield on his back, crossbow on his side, and a battle axe on the other, he single-handedly led a charge. The men saw him, and what happened to the rest of the ships? They jumped in after him and followed, and they took back the city against all odds. This is what happens when we follow a leader we are willing to die for, that we know is leading the charge. I have saw so many people, even Cedar and Des Moor, I've been in the military, my dad has been in the military, my granda was in the military. There is a difference between someone who will lead for you and go before you, and there's a difference of someone trying to push you from behind saying, you must do this. The ones who are leading from the front and leading the charge, the men will follow. The men will follow without question, without order, without even command. But when you're telling them, the men will go, and they'll go gradually.

Jesus is this kind of man. I think we really do forget the courage that he had. He's going into enemy territory. He's going to a people who hated him, who continually opposed him, who constantly challenged him, and this only gets worse and worse and worse. This is his run-up to getting close to Jerusalem. This is just before his triumphal entry. Things are getting more and more heated. He knows what he's going to do. He was literally going up to Jerusalem. He is charging the hill. So much so that his disciples are amazed at Christ. In this day and age, our fight is actually relatively similar to Jesus. Jesus was hated in his day for his message. His message was not the orthodox message of the day. It wasn't one that you could nuance to death, that to make everyone accept, to make it palatable for everyone. Jesus essentially called a spade a spade. He called good, good, and evil, evil. And this message made him hated. In our modern era, it's no different.

[11 : 43] We don't have a different message, and we don't have a different Jesus. And our opposition will also be the same. But shall we go with him? Shall we follow him?

And I want to convince you of this courage of Christ before we come to the end. Because there's a scene in the movie Troy. Now this is an old movie. Well, it's not an old movie. It's an old movie by Gen Z standards. I don't know where to look. They're all the way.

And Achilles turns around and says, after being called up and forced to fight a battle, imagine a king who fights his own battles. Wouldn't that be a sight? Here's a king who doesn't just fight his own battles. Here's a king who fights the battles for his people. Even his people who at this moment were his enemy. Now a lady in Campbelltown said, going through a grieving process, that none of us knows our future, and that's probably for the best.

Because if we did, who among us could face it? That's wise words. If we knew our future, could we face it? Could we know the suffering that we might have to endure? The pain that might come? Might we just see our future and go, I don't want any part of it. Here's someone who knew his future. I knew it in deathly detail. I want to briefly explain that. There are verses 33 and 34. So we'll go first to 34. This is the foretold Christ, the Lamb who knew. Jesus took this opportunity, such a random moment, to explain the scriptures again.

Jesus didn't just face his fate blindly. He embraced it fully, knowing exactly what awaited him. Scripture foretold this. It was at this point, Jesus decided to tell them what was going to happen to them, that they'll mock him, spit on them, flog him, kill him. And after three days, he'll rise again.

[13 : 52] Luke 8, 31, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. Jesus was teaching from the Old Testament. This is stuff that everyone should have known. Isaiah 53, the suffering servant, despised, rejected, crushed. Psalm 22, pierced hands, feet, mocked. His clothes gambled for. Zechariah 12, they will look on me, the one they have pierced. He knew he was the Passover lamb.

John the Baptist said it to him. Behold the lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world. He knew he was the suffering servant that Isaiah prophesied, and yet he also knew he would die and rise again. Every detail from his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver to his resurrection was laid out. The sacrificial system pointed to that, the spotless lamb of God. Jesus walked towards Jerusalem knowing this, knowing the scriptures, knowing what it would mean. But then we come to verse 33 as well.

It's not that he just knew in the pages academic could argue it with a rabbi sense. He knew it in greater detail than any prophet had ever foretold. We're going up to Jerusalem. The son of man will be delivered over to the chief priests, scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. Jesus' courage was not born of ignorance. That's sometimes great.

Ignorance can be a great thing. If you were in World War I and you didn't know what faced you over the trench, that was a blessing because you would never go over. If you knew what was over that trench, you would be like Blackadder trying to do everything to get out of going over. But here Jesus knew what he was going over. Greater, in as great a death as scripture could have foretold and then even some more. It says, see, three things, that he'd be delivered over, that he'd be mocked, spit on, flogged.

He'd rise on the third day. Jesus foretold that the Jewish leaders would betray him to the Romans as they lacked the authority. That has been taken away from them. They could condemn someone, but they no longer had the power of death over them. So they'll condemn him to death, but they must deliver him over. They have to give him over to the Romans. They could kill him.

[16 : 30] And they would be the one, they would be the ones, they would be the ones to ultimately put him to death. And this wasn't mere guesswork or speculation. This is divine omniscience.

Jesus saw it all clearly, yet walked towards it willingly. Jesus wasn't a helpless victim swept up by circumstances. He was in full control. His foreknowledge confirmed. He understood it.

He understood his role in the redemptive plan. If you put all of this together, I've heard it said before that just, I think it's taken the eight most common ones. This is a, some mathematician worked this out years ago, and I'm sure you've heard it before. If we were to do the same of these eight prophecies, just eight of them, there's over 300 of them being fulfilled. The chances of it happening were the same as filling the United Kingdom with pennies four foot deep, and then taking you, dropping you somewhere randomly in it and asking to pick out that penny. The analogy is used for Texas, and it's two foot deep. So that could be applied to Europe. Being dropped somewhere, pick up the penny. Jesus knew. Jesus fulfilled these in the greatest of detail. How many of us here would go, go that path, knowing what was happening? I blindly walk through life. Genuinely, I blindly walk through life. Here is a, I am a man from Armagh, from the city of St. Patrick, never wanting to have left there, but wanting to stay and join the army, stay in the same town, and build a house out in the farm on the cross. I have meandered my way through this life, the highs and the lows. And if it was laid out before me at the age of 10, even of the next 10 years, I don't think I could have borne it.

I do not stand up here as someone filled with courage. In fact, I would sooner say I am someone filled with greater cowardice.

And I look to Jesus. And the more I read of him, the more that I stand amazed that knowing what he knew, he strode towards Jerusalem. He strode towards Jerusalem.

[19 : 13] The all-knowing nature of Christ magnifies his courage. It does not take away from it. We often falter at the slightest glimpse of hardship, yet he faced it down like a bull.

Isaiah 50 even says this. It speaks of the suffering servant, his determination. But the Lord God helps me. Therefore, I have not been disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

This was Jesus' disposition while he was on mission. A face set like flint that will not be turned to the left nor the right. The big question is why? Why? If we've been here enough, you know the reason why.

You. I. His church. His bride. He is the bridegroom. He is the shepherd. He has come for his bride. He has come for his sheep. Jesus. I began this with the story of those great knights.

And they're true stories. And we all love stories of knights and dragons because there's something true in them. And here we have Christ, who in all the mythology has found flesh.

[20 : 48] He is the great knight who was sent to defeat the dragon. He is the one who charged it down, but not in a way that we would.

He is the one who would have courage and conviction for us. So much so that the disciples were amazed.

So I want to ask us. In this day and age, when the world's power seems to come around us all the more, when culture would move in like ravenous wolves, where is your courage?

Where is our courage? Where is our boldness to face opposition? Face those who would hate us. Face those who, for whatever reason, would call us whatever bigot or phobes or right-wingers.

I'm trying to think of anything that's unpopular right now. Whatever they would say. And not shy away. Not turn to the left or the right.

[21 : 58] Spurgeon put it this way. And there's a great way. He called on his people. Up with your banners, ye soldiers of the cross. This is not the time to be frightened by the cries.

Believe in your hearts what you profess to believe. Proclaim openly and zealously what you know to be the truth. Be not ashamed to say such and such things are true.

And let men draw the inference that the opposite is false. Whatever the doctrines of the gospel may be to the rest of mankind, let them be your glory and your boast.

As the author of Hebrews says, let us run our race with an endurance that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Christians, where is our courage? Where is our courage? We do not look like Christ. I have heard it so often. Christians, oh, that wasn't a nice thing to say.

[23 : 06] That was mean. Really, by the way, here's, sorry, here's the random fact that makes me, makes me not be able to remember names. Nice comes from the Latin and the French word to mean ignorant and to not know.

It doesn't mean to be kind. That's another story for another time. Where is our strength? Where is our love of devotion to be able to say, this isn't right?

This is true. That's not. This is right. This is wrong. I think this is the Ulster Protestant coming through in me, calling everything black and white. But where is our courage?

Where is our Christlikeness to be able to continue to walk in the face of opposition, knowing good from evil, knowing right from wrong, looking like Jesus.

And I am not saying to add a bit of nuance to this. I am not saying to do this bullishly or ignorantly or I've got no nice word to put it.

[24 : 11] Just don't be a pain. I'm not saying to do that. I'm not saying to go out to cause trouble. But I am saying when trouble finds you, how quick are we to turn?

How quick are we to turn? Maybe it doesn't mean this. Maybe it was Jesus a wee bit harsh here when he calls people a den of vipers, when he called the ruler a fox.

By the way, that wasn't a nice term. Foxes seem cute nowadays. Where is our courage? This is a side of Christ that I think often gets sidelined.

Am I saying to be mean or ill-spirited? No, not at all. You move forward in love, but with conviction.

This is something that we're going to have to learn as a world that really doesn't like our message more and more because this is one of the things Jesus did, and I think it's overlooked.

[25 : 15] We need to move forward, always moving forward. There's a great motto from my people that is often now misused.

No surrender. No retreat. There's a bit of boldness in that that some of us need to take up, myself included. We don't move back.

We call everything and every lofty argument in submission to the King of Kings. He strove forward for you and I. Let us not do less for him.