

Courage for the Fight

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[0 : 0 0] May God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word as we see in this passage, courage, courage for the fight. And three headings that I want to work through. First of all, the control of God, God controlling God's sovereignty that we have focused on so often even in these past, not just past weeks, but past months, the control, the sovereign control of God. And then secondly, the courage of God's servants as we see Moses and Aaron doing just as God commands them to do before Pharaoh. And then thirdly, the command of God, God in command, God, God again, really in control of every event that we read off there as he's in control of every event of our lives. You know, one of the most encouraging and challenging features of the relationship that

God has with those who serve and those who are his is that the way that God's commands, God's sovereign commands are given and the Lord's people obey these commands and obey them with courage.

God sends you into spiritual warfare and God equips you with spiritual weapons. You have the sword, the spirit, the word of God, you have your faith, you've got the weapons that God gives you to exercise and exercise with courage. Weapons to be used in that fight against sin, against Satan. But you have responsibility, you've got that responsibility, you've got that responsibility to exercise courage in that fight.

And it's that courage that we see repeated in Scripture. For example, remember when Joshua, Moses' successor, Joshua was about to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, and God's word given to Joshua, be strong and courageous.

It's that courage that the psalm writers wrote of when they wrote that I will not fear. And of course, above all, the courage of the Lord Jesus, the courage of Jesus when he faced the cross and all the horrors of the sin bearing on the cross. And yet in courage, Jesus expressed that courage before his father, not my will, but your will be done. And it's courage that we see Moses and Aaron here as they stand before Pharaoh.

[2 : 4 8] These two old men standing before the might of Pharaoh, but two old men standing in strength of God the Lord. And doing so with courage, but it's not courage through some kind of self-confidence, but courage because they first received the word of God.

They believed God, they've trusted in his sovereign control, and they'll go and do as God has commanded them to do there before Pharaoh.

And this time, there'll be no turning back as far as Moses is concerned. There'll be no questioning God and God sending Moses to stand before Pharaoh.

As we'll see by the evidence of God's power, and alongside the courage of Moses and Aaron, the Israelites will leave Egypt. God's promises will be fulfilled.

And God's purposes, God's ways triumphant over the ways of man. God, sovereign in control.

[3 : 5 8] And that control of God, we'll see more specifically even in the verses that we began reading at the end of chapter 6, Exodus chapter 6, where we read of God saying to Moses, I am the Lord, tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I say to you.

God's purposes will be fulfilled. And bring that even to ourselves. God's purposes will be fulfilled. However many times we fail him, however many times we doubt him, because God has all sufficient power and all sufficient grace.

And we see that here as the way that the story progresses, the narrative progresses in the story of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh. Even as we see, again, God making known his name.

The name of the Lord. The name that tells of God's covenant faithfulness towards his people. That name that's higher than any other name.

Higher than any Pharaoh. Any monarch. Any president. Any prime minister. Any first minister. Any ruler. Any leader.

[5 : 14] You see that even in the way that God speaks to Moses. Even the very words that God uses. I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Well, look even the way that the name of the Lord is put beside the name of Pharaoh.

The Lord, the ruler of the universe. In contrast to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. King of a territory on a tiny planet in the vastness of the universe.

See, there's no power greater than God. God rules. God is sovereign. Just as Job declared to God, as we read in Job 42.

I know that you can do all things. And that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Yet, even those who know God as Lord.

Even the many times that we have to admit that we have difficulty in accepting the truth that God is sovereign. And that God's ways are beyond understanding.

[6 : 19] And that God's ways, yes, will be fulfilled. I mean, even Moses had that difficulty as we see him, as we've seen him complaining to God about himself being a man of faltering lips.

That he wasn't able to convince Pharaoh the first time. So how was he going to convince Pharaoh again to let the Israelites go? That God will reveal his grace to the weak doubter.

Just as God reveals here to Moses God's unalterable purposes. You see that in, well, start of chapter 7.

And it's God who says what will happen. What will happen to bring about the exodus from Egypt. We see even in these first five verses in chapter 7.

God's speaking to Moses to assure Moses that Moses need not fear. That what God has promised is as good as fulfilled. And Moses needs to comply with God's commands.

[7 : 25] And Moses will see the truth that with God on his side, he doesn't need to worry. He doesn't need to hide behind his excuses of weakness.

When he believes and knows that God is in control. And it's that rule of faith. That rule of faith for each one of you who know the Lord as God, as a Savior.

Faith to believe in the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing God. God whose word can't be altered. God whose ways can't be thwarted.

So trust him for his grace. Trust him when he sends you to serve him. Even when the work that God gives you to do appears difficult. If he sends you, he'll equip you.

That's our sending God. God doesn't send you into a particular situation, a particular work, without equipping you for the task of performing what God has given you to do.

[8 : 26] And you'll know a victory, not in your own strength, but in his strength. And often, in most surprising ways, as we see here in this extraordinary statement that God makes to Moses.

God speaking to Moses in a particular way to calm Moses' anxiety. And the Lord said to Moses, See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.

And the words are important here. It's not, you know, see, I have made you like a God. That's not what's in the original language. It's I shall make you like God.

In other words, Moses has been given God's authority to act in power, to address Pharaoh, to show Pharaoh wonder upon wonder through acting like God, demonstrating God's power as will soon be seen in the plagues that come upon Egypt.

And Aaron is going to be like a prophet, giving a vocal word that Moses has been given from God to give to Pharaoh. And it's not only the statement of these roles that Moses and Aaron are going to play that we see in such a wonderful way.

[9 : 49] It's the promises, the promises of God that God is going to do to encourage Moses. As we know, Moses at first was very reluctant to do what God gives him, and as we'll see in the passage that follows, the passages that follow, Pharaoh at first refuses to do what Moses asks him to do.

But even though God won't cause Pharaoh to soften his heart, Pharaoh's heart's already hardened through an evil heart, but God's will will be done.

Listen again how God speaks to Moses. There are many, many times in the life of the believer when God steps in with a word and season.

A timely reminder of God's love towards you. A timely reminder of God's enabling presence with you. And the times when God steps in, as it were, into your life, at particular times, given these words of season, perhaps by a verse from Scripture that perhaps you read one morning in your quiet time, perhaps something that's said in a sermon, maybe a passage from a book, maybe one of the many communications that we read in social media to bring comfort to the Lord's people.

And we have to say that, yes, in addition to Scripture, read and read and read again even the works that God has given through godly men and women.

[11 : 52] Works that have brought comfort to the troubled soul. Let me encourage you even to read Puritan authors whose works are up to date, and especially helpful in times of distress and difficulty.

I'll give you one example. The Puritan Richard Sibbes, he wrote, so much based on God's word to give encouragement to believers. One such encouragement is a little book that's now published, or been republished, The Bruised Reed.

This little work on Isaiah 42, 1-3, and that work's been a blessing to so many Christians during particularly dark and difficult times.

And one such Christian is the late Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones, and he writes this of that book, I shall never cease to be grateful to Richard Sibbes, who was balm to my soul at a period in my life when I was overworked and badly overtired, and therefore subject in an unusual manner to the onslaught of the devil.

The Bruised Reed quietened, soothed, comforted, and encouraged, and healed me. And that healing balm of God's word applied through the writings of, well, the writings of saints past, saints present.

[13 : 18] So often God has used these words to bring comfort and encouragement, yes, to the tired, and the weary, and the perplexed, and the bewildered. And yes, use even this time that God has given us in lockdown to read and read again and to hear God speak to you, even through his servants past and servants present.

As God heard Moses speak to him, as God assured Moses that all was well, even in that cauldron in Pharaoh's palace.

And so we see, as we see in particularly verses 6 to 7, Moses' courage strengthened. Moses given that courage, as we read there, of the courage of God's servants.

Moses and Aaron did so. Did this the Lord commanded them to do. Now Moses was 80 years old, and Aaron 83 years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

And it's these words that are repeated in this passage, that they did just as the Lord commanded them. Their faith was invigorated.

[14 : 28] The resolve to do what God commanded them to do, the resolve was strengthened and refreshed, so they're not going to turn back. And they've got this courage that God has given them to go right there into the palace of Pharaoh.

And you see the way that they exercise courage in the face of, well, apparent hurdles, apparent difficulties, the opposition of Pharaoh. I mean, Moses and Aaron, they didn't have any political power in Egypt at that time.

They didn't have a status that befitted, as it were, their presence before Pharaoh. But they did have one supreme guide, one supreme presence with them.

They had the presence of God with them. They had God with them. They had the assuring voice of God speak to them to take their stand against the might of Pharaoh.

Yes, I suppose Pharaoh could have called on his armed men to seize Moses and Aaron there and then. But God was with his servants. God was with them. God protected them.

[15 : 40] God enabled them to take their stand for justice and right. And so with God with them to show courage, not by their own natural disposition, but courage and strength of God the Lord.

Just as David sang in Psalm 18, for with you I can run against a troop and with my God I can leap over a wall. Now, yes, we have to say it took time for Moses to grasp that truth of God's power with them, and God's presence with them.

But there he is, standing before Pharaoh, along with his brother, standing there with that courage to take that stand that marked him out as somebody, yes, who had grown in faith in the one true God.

It may well be that God's been patient with you, especially when we've lacked faith in God's promises. Even those many times when we've cowered in fear, when we ought to have been strong and courageous and standing up to the pharaohs of the day, when we've resisted, as it were, standing for truth in a world that despises truth, when instead of being proactive for the cause of the gospel, we've hidden our lights under that, these are bushels.

But, you know, I think I communicated just the other day, as the hymn writer Norman MacLeod wrote, Courage, brother, do not stumble, though your path be dark as night.

[17 : 21] There's a star to guide the humble. Trust in God and do the right. Trust in God and do the right. Well, there's Moses, as we've read.

Moses standing before Pharaoh, and he's trusting in God to do the right. But there's something else that we have to notice here as well, and that's Moses and Aaron's ages.

We're given their age. Moses is 80, Aaron 83. These men are elderly. And the fact that this has been recorded in the Scripture isn't just for some kind of casual remark.

But this is relevant. Here are these two octogenarians who might see at their time of life, maybe preferring to have a quiet retirement, a winding down, leaving the struggles of conflict behind them.

But what do we see here? They're being thrust into the limelight and to be active in the service of the Lord. And as we know, Moses on more than one occasion had expressed doubt and even bewilderment at God calling him to do what God had commanded him to do.

[18 : 34] Nevertheless, God has been patient with Moses. God has dealt graciously with Moses. And Moses does obey. He does just as the Lord commanded him to do.

And so there's Moses and Aaron on that road of obedience, even in their latter years. And we have to say that for Moses, these latter years, his last 40 years of life, even from age 80, they were the most productive years in his service for the Lord.

We might say something like this. Moses' first years in the Egyptian palace, well, he tried to be somebody. His next 40 years in the wilderness, he thought he was a nobody.

But his last 40 years, he learned to rely on God, for God to give him that strength and that courage and that commitment to serve him. And so Moses and Aaron, they serve even in their latter years.

I think there are a number of lessons that we can learn, even from this little section here in verses 6 to 7. The first rule is this, that God's going to use those who are his, whatever age we are.

[19 : 53] You're not yesterday's man or yesterday's woman. Age is no barrier in the service for the Lord. We can say this whether you're young, whether you're old.

In fact, I think we can say this, even, think of some of, even those whom you know who have been so influential in your lives, even in the winter of their lives, have been such a testimony to the grace and the love of God, even in their witness to their Lord and Savior.

Again, I think we can say this, that the wise of the church are most often those who've passed through life's turmoils, who've traversed through the rivers of danger and have walked through the fire of adversity, but with the Lord by their side.

God with them, God for them. So don't despise the wisdom of the fathers of the church, those who've walked the old paths and who're continuing on them until God calls them home.

And whatever pattern of life that God gives you, yes, remember this, that God will humble you at particular times in your life, but doing so in order to draw you closer to Him so that, as with Moses, relying fully on God's power, on God's leading and God's guiding, and relying on Him for God's glory, and yes, for the good of your soul, just as Moses would learn there in his latter 40 years of his life.

[21 : 35] We see there, finally, the command of God in verses 8 to 13. And really, from that verse where we're going to see this demonstration of God's power through the staff of Aaron, we might say that the drama is starting to build up because words, well, words have now been spoken, but now's the time for action, and action under the command of God.

If you like, God in command of the situation, and that command of God that will lead to the Israelites being let free from Egypt.

And even before the ten plagues happen, there's a starter, if you like. There's a demonstration of the superior authority of God over Pharaoh and over all that Pharaoh stood for in the false religion of Egypt.

Look again at the details. God knows, God as God knows, that Pharaoh's going to demand from Moses and Aaron a sign to demonstrate the power of Moses God.

And you can just read Pharaoh's mind at this point. You know, once this is done, Pharaoh's going to ask his sorcerers to outperform Moses and Aaron. Pharaoh's going to show, you can hear his thinking, he's going to show the superiority of his, well, of himself as the God-king of Egypt.

[23 : 07] Pharaoh's going to show that his power is superior and so that will confirm that there's no way that he's going to let the Israelites leave Egypt on the call on the behalf of another God whom Pharaoh will regard as less than himself.

But what do we see in the story, the narrative? Aaron throws his staff into the ground and he becomes a snake. And the Egyptian sorcerers, they do the same.

snakes from the staffs. But far from outperforming Moses and Aaron, the snakes of the Egyptian sorcerers are swallowed up, swallowed up by the snake of Aaron.

Well, that's the story in miniature. But there's much that we can take from this for our own application. And first we have to see in this a sign.

It's a sign here. There's something pointing beyond the miracle itself to God's triumph over his enemies. The very fact that even God is using this incident in relation to a snake was relevant.

[24 : 20] Pharaohs had crowns in their head and on top of the crown was the form of a snake, a cobra. This was to indicate Pharaoh's authority. But throwing down Aaron's staff and Aaron's staff consuming all the others indicated, of course, that true authority is with God and not with Pharaoh.

But then, bring this to ourselves. Bring this to yourselves. Don't be over-anxious about the fact that here are these magicians, these sorcerers doing the same as Aaron did with Aaron's staff.

as Scripture informs us. Satan appears to do similar works to God. Jesus spoke of these days in Mark 13 when false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect if that were possible.

You see, Satan's the great deceiver. And yes, sometimes Satan does come as a man of peace when in fact he's the author of lies.

There will be many opponents of the Lord Jesus who will appear to be for him, who will be able to utter wonderful things from the mouth, appear even to duplicate the works of the Lord's people, even who will claim Christ as Lord for their hearts far from God.

[25 : 52] The crucial point is this from the story here. The staff of God swallowed up the staff of Satan. What happened there in the Egyptian palace doesn't just represent the victory of God over Pharaoh, but represents the overall victory, the triumph of God over all his enemies.

And yet, despite that visual picture of God's power, despite all that had been presented to Pharaoh to indicate Pharaoh's weakness before the one true God, Pharaoh refuses to yield.

Pharaoh's heart becomes hardened. I mean, the evidence was there. He saw it with his own eyes, and yet he wouldn't submit to the one who's higher than himself.

And isn't that even a pattern for all who reject our Lord and God, for all who reject the Lord Jesus, even though the evidence is there, even though the evidence of changed lives, transformed lives, even though the power of God is demonstrated in the transforming grace of God.

And yet, those who have already made up their mind hardened hearts to the gospel and won't listen to God's messengers delivering God's word.

[27 : 20] I pray that's not anyone watching on this morning, even attending this service, whether live or later on. It's not you who've hardened your heart, who won't allow the evidence of God's grace to impact your life and to bring you to that point where you turn to Him and trust Him and give Him your life.

And I pray that you who have responded to God's free offer of the gospel will know that God has triumphed over Satan, over sin, and yes, triumphed over death itself.

That you will truly know and surely know that you have that promise of God, to be with Him, that He is with you always, and that you have that promise even when you pass into glory, that you will know His presence with you, that you truly will behold Him face to face, because He is God, He is Lord, whose word is true and sure.

Have that courage then to stand for the Savior, even in the sight of eternity. Have that courage to do as God commands you to do, and serve Him, serve Him with all your might, all your strength, in love for Him, and in love for others.

So may God bless to us His word this day. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and for your patience with us, for your hand upon your people.

[29 : 03] May it be, Lord, that for any who lack that courage to stand for you, Lord, may you shower upon them your grace, your enabling power, that they may truly take that stand for truth, and show forth the word of God, the love of God, the grace of God, and be your servants, not simply in name, but in practice.

So Lord, may it truly be that as we have read of Moses and Aaron doing just as you commanded them to do, may your people truly do as they did, to do as you command them to do.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.