

“Courage In Times of Challenge”
Stewarding the Presence Series, Part 16

In the late 90's and early 2000's there was an intense rivalry in the NFL. One of my favorite players Eddie George (who is a believer) and Ray Lewis from the Baltimore Ravens. These two had some intense games. Lewis claims that he knocked George out cold in a 1997 game. Ray Lewis was feared. One time in a game against the Cincinnati Bengals, another player Named Chad Ochocinco tried to blindside Ray Lewis and hit him when he was not looking. The result was that Chad was helped off the field. He hurt himself trying to hurt Ray Lewis. But in the playoffs of 2003 Eddie George had a dislocated shoulder injury but still played in the game. He quoted Psalm 27 stating that he had no fear. In an 88-yard rush Ray Lewis was approaching Eddie George and Eddie delivers one of the nastiest stiff arms I have ever seen knocking Lewis to the ground. Isn't interesting how others are affected when there is an act of courage. Eddie George showed the rest of the league that Ray Lewis was just a man who had weak spots like everyone else. I'm sure Ray Lewis wasn't just embarrassed, but probably had some worry thinking he didn't look so tough anymore.

Today we are going to look at John 16 when Jesus is giving a final address to His disciples. Jesus is about to die, resurrect, and ascend to the Father. The disciples would be left to start the church and face extreme persecution. Jesus is going to explain to them how to have supernatural courage to withstand all that was to come. In fact, the first 300 years or so after Jesus was resurrected were filled with crucifixions, imprisonments, persecution, and more. The church of Jesus Christ was marginalized and outcast from culture. That was of course until 380 A.D. when Christianity became the official religion for the Roman world. When this happened, Christianity became mainstream and culturally forced upon the people. The interesting thing is that the church did so much better when it was persecuted. Just like the Israelites in bondage in Egypt...the more they were oppressed, the bigger they grew. The more the church was persecuted, the larger it spread. I think it has to do with two things. The first is that people who endure persecution for a cause prove that what they are living for is worth dying for. Deep inside there is something in us that needs to live for something we are willing to die for. The second thing is that joining the church which was under persecution was a display of courage. Courage is contagious and empowering to others. When you take courage, you are not only impacting your life, but influencing the lives of others around you. Think about Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14. The Israelites are once again shaking in their sandals and scared to do anything about their enemy the Philistines. But Jonathan and his armor bearer were not going to sit around and do nothing. So, Jonathan approaches the Philistines in the open...in a valley. I'm not sure if you know this but that's not a good military strategy. They stood out in the open, just the two of them saying, "Hey enemies, we are over here hello!" Next, they pray and ask the Lord for a sign and the Philistines call them to come up the cliff so they can tell Jonathan something. Jonathan and his armor bearer climb up hand and foot...again not a good military strategy. But there is something about courage. You all know the story. Once Jonathan and his armor bearer get to the top, they just start slaughtering the enemy. It's one of my favorite stories in the Bible...probably because I'm a guy who likes action movies. But the story ends with the Israelites seeing this act of courage and stepping into their true calling and join the fight. Not only that, but the Israelites who were in hiding in the Philistine camp came out to fight. One act of courage spark courage in every heart of the Israelites.

I believe the story of Jonathan and his armor bearer is prophetic. There were three different kinds of people in the story. The first was Jonathan the courageous one. The second was the Israelites who were in hiding, the scared ones. The third was the Israelites who rebelled against their own people and joined the Philistines. Modern Christians can fall under these three categories as well. You are either courageously fighting in the army of God, hiding in fear, or sinning and joining what the enemy is doing. Supernatural courage is needed so that we can walk in the will of God and influence those in rebellion and in hiding.

Today we are going to see how Jesus prepped His disciples for what was coming ahead. They would be outcast, they would be persecuted, and they would be killed. You and I have all kinds of problems in life, but I bet none of you are facing crucifixion or jail time for loving the Lord. The good news is that the same empowerment Jesus gave His disciples for the trials that were soon coming is the same empowerment that you and I have today. His name is Holy Spirit. You and I have been blessed with authority from heaven and the same power that raised Jesus from the grave. You and I have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and equipping us to not only stand against trials and tribulations, but to take courage that we can fully walk in our calling while on this earth.

Courage is needed today. The world needs to see the church unafraid of cancel culture or offending people. The Gospel in its very nature is offensive because it calls you to die to yourself and make Jesus Lord of your life. We need courageous Christians who set the example not only in our culture, but in our homes, in our schools, and in our work environments. Let's see what Jesus tells His disciples. If you have your Bibles, go with me to John chapter 16 and we are going to being in verse 1:

***“These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4 But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. 5 “But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*”**

These last few verses can be really confusing. It can sound like God convicts us of our sin. It sounds holy, but when you really look at the text it says something different. It says the Holy Spirit convicts the *world* of sin, not believers. In verse nine Jesus says concerning sin because *they* do not believe...and concerning righteousness *you* no longer see Me. There are three things the Holy Spirit will convict. He convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgement. He convicts the unsaved of their sin because they need salvation. He convicts the believer of their righteousness because they may have believed a lie that they are not the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

The Holy Spirit convicts the devil of his judgement because Jesus won, and death lost. When the Holy Spirit convicts you, child of God, He is convicting you of your identity and of your righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. You are not a sinner; you are a saint. You are not a victim; you are a victor in Christ. So fill out point number one. When it comes to walking in supernatural courage...

POINT #1 – Are you Convicted of your righteousness?

Here's an old story but a good one. When Gabe was around kindergarten age, he was standing in line at the snack shack. Gabriel had a problem with snacks in elementary. He once spent his weeks' worth of lunch money in a single day at the snack shack. I don't know who I was more mad at, him or the teacher who gave him all those snacks in one day! Well, one day he was standing in line and the principal's son who was on staff pretended to cut in line. The kids started yelling, "you can't do that!" The principal's son said, "It's ok, I'm the principal's son." Then Gabe popped his head out and said, "Well I'm the pastor's son and that better...get out." No lack of confidence there. That same principal's son used to have a little saying. If anyone ever said anything mean to him, he would say, "It's ok, I know where my love comes from." What he was saying is that all of his joy and love come from the Father and he didn't *need* any person to give him what he already had in God. I wish a lot more Christians were like that. You and I need to be so convinced of our identity in Christ that we can passionately defend it when we receive an attack or lie. If the devil lies to you and says, "You're unworthy, you're a failure, you'll never get anything right" and your response is to agree with it...you have not allowed the truth of your identity to penetrate your heart. If your natural response is a passionate defense you know that the truth of your identity is not head knowledge but true revelation that has transformed you. Let's continue in John 16 at verse 12:

12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

I might have said this last week but Jesus promised us "another Helper" in John 14:16. In the Greek the word for "Helper" doesn't mean another as in a different person. It means another of the same kind. If I go to a fancy restaurant with you and let you order first and I love what you ordered, I will say, "That sounds good, I will have exactly what they ordered." When Jesus promised *another* Helper, He meant the same. You hear all the time "The disciples were so blessed to have Jesus in the flesh with them." You and I have the same thing the disciples had in the Holy Spirit. In the same way Jesus disciplined the twelve, the Holy Spirit disciplines us. And the Holy Spirit is not here in the flesh, He dwells within us. He is even closer than Jesus was to the disciples. He is such an important ministry that Jesus said it is better that I leave you so that the Holy Spirit can come.

I have joked about this before but the reason the Holy Spirit is called "The Comforter" is because you and I will need to be comforted. We need to be comforted because we face a world that hates us and we will forever step out in faith to win the lost. Holy Spirit is our Teacher, our Helper, our

Guide, our Truth, our Strength, and fills us with gifts and power. You would be a fool to neglect the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus Himself needed the ministry of the Holy Spirit, how much more you and I?" So if you want to walk in supernatural courage, you need the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Fill out point number two:

POINT #2 – Are you relying on the Holy Spirit?

One of the best ways we can hear the voice of God is through the Scriptures. One of the best ways we can rely on the Holy Spirit is with our words. Jesus promised that we will face trials and tribulations. So, when those trials come what is your response? If your response is "What am I gonna do about this?" You are not relying on the Holy Spirit. If your response in the middle of a trial is "Holy Spirit, I need Your help. What do you want me to do in this moment?" You are relying on the Spirit. It is a the dependance on the Holy Spirit. I love what Paul says about his reliance on the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NASB1995

The Apostle Paul lived a courageous life and these verses speak of the reason. He wanted to know nothing but Jesus his ministry marked by a *demonstration* of the Spirit. Let's finish up John 16 beginning in verse 29:

29 His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. 30 Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." – John 16:1-15; 29-33 NASB1995

The Greek word for "take courage" is *tharseo* and it means, "take heart, take courage, be of good cheer, be confident." I think that is why so many translations say so many different things. It is a pregnant and powerful word.

The church has often been accused of just being a self-help, motivational speaking show. It is so tempting as a preacher to just give you 7 easy steps to live the carefree life. So many sermons are aimed at trying to get you past trials and difficulty. And every human has struggled at one point in their life with not experiencing joy until the problem is over. But God doesn't just give peace and joy when the trial is all over. In fact, He gives you peace, power, and joy before and *in* the trial! It is His joy and peace that is actually the fuel you need to endure to the end. Notice that Jesus is telling His disciples that they are going to face all kinds of difficulties when He leaves.

But He tells them to take courage or take heart. Did you notice that before Jesus said to take courage He first said, “These things I have spoken to you that you might have peace.”

POINT #3 – Are you walking in Jesus’ Peace?

CONCLUSION – Why do we need courage? Because the enemy will use anything to keep you from abiding in the Father. When you live with supernatural courage, you are not distracted or intimidated by the enemy or his lies.