

An Encouraging Piece of Advice Deuteronomy 31:6

INTRODUCTION: If you would, please open your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 31. To provide some background to what's going on in this passage, Israel is about to undergo a significant turning point in their history. After spending forty years wandering in the desert, they are finally allowed to enter into the land promised to them by God. Unfortunately Moses, who has been Israel's leader this entire time, is unable to join them. So before he passes the mantle of responsibility to his successor, Joshua, Moses gives one final piece of advice to the children of Israel, which we find here in Deuteronomy 31. Now, we'll start reading in verse 1, but our main emphasis is going to be in verse 6...

v.6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

The advice Moses gives to the people is to have courage. This, like most of what Moses said, is good advice, for it provides a valuable lesson in the workings of true courage. But this lesson wasn't just for the Israelites; it's for us as Christians today, especially in light of current circumstances. That is what I would like to talk to you about today. But before we continue, let us pray...

QUESTION: What Do We Learn About Courage from This Verse?

INCOMPLETE SENTENCE: We Learn What:

I. COURAGE IS (v. 6a)

- A. Moses used two words to convey courage:
- i. Strong – from the Hebrew châzaq (khaw-zak')
 - To be firm, be secure, to withstand
 - To be capable of withstanding force or wear; solid
 - ii. Courage – from the Hebrew 'âmats (aw-mats')
 - To be determined, to make oneself alert, to exhibit strength
 - The spirit that enables one to face danger
- B. To paraphrase: Courage is that ability to face any enemy or opposition head on, either by running out to meet it or by digging in your heels and saying “Bring it on.”

II. COURAGE ISN'T (v. 6b)

- A. Courage Isn't Fear
- i. Fear – from the Hebrew yârê' (yaw-ray')
 - To be dreadful, to make afraid, to terrify
 - A feeling caused by present or imminent danger
 - ii. Afraid – from the Hebrew 'ârats (aw-rats')
 - To dread, to cause to tremble
 - To be filled with fear

- iii. Fear is the exact opposite of courage; instead of wanting you to dig in your heels, it wants you to turn tail and run
- B. If we could recall, it was fear that caused the previous generation of Israelites to lose faith in God and caused the wandering in the wilderness:

v.30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

v.31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

v.32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.

v.34 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

—Numbers 13:30-14:1

- C. We are never forced to give into our fears; it's our choice either to fall into fear or stand up in courage; as the apostle Paul reminds us, "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*" (2nd Timothy 1:7)
- D. I recall hearing of the account of Chinese evangelist Wang Ming Dao. In 1955, he was put in prison for his faith in Jesus Christ, but out of fear he soon renounced his faith and was released from his imprisonment. Afterwards he lived with such torment of his soul that he walked the streets of Beijing saying, "My name is Peter; my name is Peter. I've denied my Lord." Soon, Mao Zedong put him back into prison—this time for eighteen years. Wang Ming Dao said every day in prison he woke up and sang the hymn by the hymn writer Fanny Crosby,

*All the way my Savior leads me; What have I
to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy,
Who through life has been my guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort, Here by
faith in Him to dwell! For I know whate'er
befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.*

At first the guards tried to silence him. When they weren't able to succeed, they resignedly put up with his singing. Gradually, as the years went by, they would gather near the opening to

his cell to listen as he sang of God's faithfulness to him. Eventually, they began to ask him to sing to them and to teach them the words of the song.

- E. Even if we do cave into fear, our God is gracious enough to grant us other opportunities to serve Him.

III. CAUSES COURAGE (v. 6c)

- A. There's only one Person that can provide us with true courage, and that is God.
- B. God does three things for us that should give us courage:
- i. *God goes with us* – He is our constant travel companion down the path of life, watching the road and making sure we're prepared for any and all obstacles that come our way; as David so eloquently wrote in Psalm 23:4,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

- ii. *God never leaves us* – Even in the most dangerous of circumstances, He is there in the thick of it; He never runs from the battle.
- iii. *God never forsakes us* – He will never, ever let us out our sight, even when we want Him to leave us alone

- C. To put it simply, "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31).

Conclusion:

QUESTION: What Do We Learn About Courage from This Verse?

INCOMPLETE SENTENCE: We Learn What:

I. COURAGE IS

II. COURAGE ISN'T

III. CAUSES COURAGE

APPLICATION: In the days in which we live, it seems courage is in short supply. Every day our televisions and newsfeeds are bombarded with headlines designed to evoke worry, doubt, and fear. Worse still, humanity is looking toward itself for the solution to our current problems, only to provoke more uncertainty. Is there anything we can do to save ourselves? The answer is no.

But there is a greater authority whose power is more than capable of overcoming the fears of this world, and that is God. When the world was in darkness, He sent His Son to bring life and salvation for all who would receive Him. Perhaps you're tuning into this message and wondering, "I'm tired living in fear; I want to

experience courage.” There is that courage available to you tonight, and it comes through the saving power of Jesus Christ. But in order to receive it, there must first come a step of humility, a recognition that you cannot save yourself, and acknowledgement that you are a sinner in need of a Savior (*Romans 3:23*). Once you take that initial step, then you must be willing to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and confess His name for the forgiveness of your sins (*Romans 10:9-13*). Are you ready to receive Christ tonight?

And what about you, Christian? Perhaps you’re saying, “I know I’m a born-again believer, but I’m still fearful; how can I experience God’s courage in my life once more?” As the author of Hebrews reminds us, “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*” (*Hebrews 13:8*). The same Lord who promised the Israelites that He would never leave them or forsake them is fulfilling that promise for us today. If you have had the faith and courage to trust Him with your eternity, then you can trust Him with your today. Let us pray again together...

As we close, I would like to leave you with a memorable quote from one of the leading “experts” in the field of courage (also known as the Cowardly Lion from the *Wizard of Oz*):

Courage! What makes a king out of a slave?
Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave?
Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist, or the dusky dusk?
What makes the muskrat guard his musk?
Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder?
Courage! What makes the dawn come up like

thunder? Courage! What makes the Hottentots so hot? What puts the "ape" in apricot? Courage!

And what allows us to stand tall in the face of opposition, and to fight the good fight of faith with confidence that God is with us no matter what? Courage.

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Let’s be courageous with the Lord today.