

True Courage

Courage takes various forms. However, one thing is for certain: courage is never self-serving but rather fuels gospel witness! Consequently, for a follower of Jesus the alternative - cowardice - is not an option. No wonder that even a cursory reading of the Bible shows that God calls His children to be courageous and bold (Deut 31:6-7; Joshua 1:6-7, 9; 1 Chron 28:2; Acts 4:13, 9:27-28, et al.) while lending His presence and support.

As the story of Nehemiah climbs to its celebratory climax in chapter 12, we are reminded that Jerusalem remained largely uninhabited (Neh 7:4). Despite the temple and city walls having been rebuilt and restored, the former exiles remained in the surrounding villages and towns. So, in order to repopulate the city, one out of every ten individuals was chosen to move into its confines through the means of casting lots. Additionally, volunteers courageously joined the plea to move to God's city. Nehemiah describes the process this way:

Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. **And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.** (Nehemiah 11:1-2)

Courage originates from within, from the heart (*cor*, latin for heart), and is not an absence of fear, but the triumph over it. Those who voluntarily offered to live in Jerusalem are described as "valiant men" (v. 6), "men of valor" (v. 8), and even "mighty men of valor" (v. 14). In other words, they were courageous! Why was their volunteerism considered courageous? Because, with the completion of the temple, the rebuilding of the wall, and the hanging of the gates, Jerusalem became a target for marauding armies. It became a dangerous place to live. Furthermore, their move likely required a change in occupation, loss of income, and uncertainty of their future. Nevertheless, the volunteers recognized their return from the Babylonian captivity as an opportunity to glorify the LORD who brought them back. Since they owed everything to this faithful and gracious One, they freely offered themselves to Him - to do what He wanted them to do and go where He wanted them to go. By inhabiting Jerusalem, they signified that it was God's city from which He was to be made known to the world.

Pastor J.D. Greear insists that “courage believes not only that God is bigger than the opposition but also better than all the alternatives.” This type of courage should be evident in the life of every Christian - yours and mine! It should astonish the lookers and the listeners, because, though we are frail and simple, we never lack the presence and support of our Savior when we do His work in His way and for His glory.

Acts 4:13 (ESV) - “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”