

05/16/10

Who Are You #6 – Afraid or Courageous? Deuteronomy 31:1-8

- many of us have friends or loved ones serving our country in Afghanistan or other dangerous places around the world...
- in a church this size, this topic touches dozens if not hundreds of people here in one way or another...
- something that over time I think we unfortunately take for granted is the kind of courage and bravery required by many men and women who are serving our country and our world...
- One example is Sergeant 1st Class John I. Smith, Jr... **[show pic]**
- a few weeks ago, Sergeant Smith earned the Silver Star Medal, which is the third highest award for valor given by our country, for his courage when he ran through enemy fire refusing treatment for his own wounds and saved the life of one of his teammates...
 - Smith and his platoon were called in to assist a group of Afghans at a National Police Station who had come under fire by enemy combatants...
 - they secured the area and began to treat the Afghan wounded...
 - at that point, the enemy who is trying to disrupt freedom and law/order in that part of the world fired rocket propelled grenades, along with machine guns with armor piercing rounds, and AK-47 small arms fire at our troops...
 - after Smith's team achieved fire superiority, some of the men went to check on what appeared to be an Afghan casualty...
 - as soon as they reached the man, they realized the enemy had a machine-gun team 250 meters away who opened fire on them...wounding one of the American soldiers who was now stranded and down in the middle of the road and in need of immediate aide...the official report reads like this...
 - **Without hesitation, Smith refused treatment for his own wounds, gathered a two-man-medical team and led them through incoming grenades and enemy fire as they crossed open ground and reached the Soldier. "I had to get face-to-face with the enemy to get the Soldier," said Smith. "We got into a shooting match while I was trying to evacuate the Soldier to get him medical attention."..."I don't feel like I am a hero, I was just doing my job as an Infantry platoon sergeant," said Smith. "I signed up to be a Soldier and few get into situations like this, but I believe that everyone in my platoon right now is willing and able to do what I did." "All my years in the Army prepared me to do my job," said Smith. "The most important detail for me is that all my men made it out alive."**
- I realize that we have men and women in our church family who know first-hand what a situation like that is like...others have sons or daughters or friends or loved ones who are there right now...and they are deserving of our prayers and our appreciation...
- There are many lessons that stand out from that story – but one of them is the beauty and power of courage...being willing to do whatever has to be done with no thought of personal safety in order to accomplish an objective...
 - it is right that our country would honor men and women like Sergeant Smith...
- now, you and I will probably not be called upon to serve our country or another person like that this week...but the fact is, God gives His people opportunities every day to choose to act in a way that is courageous...this morning we're going to try to learn more about that from the OT book of Deuteronomy chapter 31... please open your Bible to Deuteronomy chapter 31...page 156 of the front section of the Bible under the chair on front of you...
- this morning is the sixth of a seven week series entitled **Who Are You? – Coming to Grips with Your Identity in Christ.**

- we've been trying to point out that we all have different lens, or ways we choose to think about ourselves...answers to the question, who are you?...
- in our first study, we looked at Zechariah chapter 3, and asked...are you...**Ashamed or Forgiven?**
- then Pastor Green posed the question from Romans 6, are you **Bound or Free?**
- next we studied Ephesians 1 along with a couple of other important parallel passages and asked, are you **Rejected or Adopted?**
- then we looked at 1 Corinthians 15 and asked, are you **Adrift or Anchored?...**
- and then last week we examined Hebrews 13 and asked -- are you **Deserted or Befriended?...**
- now, when you start to put the package together, for followers of Jesus Christ, we've identified 5 very important answers to the question we've posed – who am I?...I'm forgiven, and I'm free, I'm adopted, I'm anchored, and I'm befriended...and the goal is to use those principles to govern the way you respond to the circumstances around us each and every day...
- this morning we'd like to add another question to the list – are you **Afraid or Courageous?...**and we'd like to let Deuteronomy 31 help us answer that question...
- I should also mention that these verses are the foundation of the passage we studied last week in Hebrews 13...today we're going to take the time to place them in their historical context...and focus more clearly on the issue of courage...

- read Deuteronomy 31:1-8...

- so we're asking, are you afraid, or are you courageous?...and with the time we have remaining...let's look at **3 ways to think about courage; who you were, who you are, and who you can be.**

I. Who You Were – Afraid.

- fear is one of the most powerful emotions in the human experience...and it is really amazing how frequently this topic comes up in Scripture...
- this subject is like going to Baskin Robbins and asking for different flavors of fear...and you have this cone with 31 scoops and you sit down and start licking...
- that's what I'd like us to do for the next few moments...think about the various ways you and I experience fear...first, there's the issue of being...

A. Afraid of condemnation.

- last week we spent a bit of time in the Garden of Eden...
- return there again for a moment in your mind...
- after Adam and Eve sinned, what did they do?...they tried to hide from God....which shows how irrational sin can be...
- and then when the Lord spoke with them about that matter, Adam said...
- **Genesis 3:10 - "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."**
- there are significant lessons from that verse alone...but we all know what it is like to sin, and then fear kicks in because of all the possible consequences...
- and a person must either have an answer to this problem that moves him closer to God or invariably he will allow the fear of condemnation to motivate all sorts of covering-up and hiding and blaming type strategies...
- the day I was preparing this message the executives from BP and the other companies involved in the latest gulf disaster were being grilled on Capitol Hill...
- the banner on the CNN website was – Oil Execs say – Spill was the other guys fault...
- that's where the fear of condemnation takes you...closely related to that is being...

B. Afraid of consequences.

- do you remember when the messenger of the Lord explained to Abraham that he and his wife Sarah would have a son in their old age...
- where was Sarah when that conversation was unfolding...
- **Genesis 18:10 – And Sarah was listening at the tent door...**
- and how did she respond to this promise of God?...she laughed...and the Scripture is silent on exactly what kind of laugh it was...probably a laugh of incredulity...[yeah, like that's going to happen]...
- the problem was – she laughed loud enough that the messenger heard it...
- **Genesis 18:13-14 - And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’ “Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”**
- then they brought Sarah into the conversation... **Genesis 18:15 - Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh.”**
- it was one of those conversations that happens all the time...she did something she shouldn't have done, and then when she was confronted about it – she tried to lie to the Lord...[which is a really bad idea) --- why?...because of the power of being afraid of consequences...
- and it's amazing how those habits show up in the next generation...
 - their son Isaac was traveling with his wife Rebecca, and what lie did he tell?...
- **Genesis 26:7 - When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “my wife,” *thinking*, “the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.”**
- here's another powerful one...

C. Afraid of your past being exposed.

- do you remember this from the life of Moses...
- an Egyptian was beating a Hebrew man, and Moses killed the Egyptian...
- the next day he tried to intervene in a dispute between two of his Hebrew brethren, and here's what happened...
- **Exodus 2:14 - But he said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.”**
- and because of that, he fled to the land of Midian...as if that would stop God from exposing his past if that's what God chose to do...
- and that's exactly where some people are living...they're always moving around, or changing jobs, or churches...and are very reluctant to let people get close to them...because of the skeletons...“I'm afraid because the matter might become known”...and people would reject me or think less of me...

D. Afraid of giants or other enemies.

- there are many verses like this in the Bible...
- you may have already been thinking about the men of Israel and their response to Goliath the giant...
- **1 Samuel 17:24 - When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid.**
- **1 Samuel 28:5 - When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.**
- it's not pleasant to think about, but we all have enemies...

- and that can be true for many reasons...but in some cases it's simply because you're a Christian and some people don't like that...
- so every day at work that person tries to make your life miserable...or at school...or in your neighborhood...
 - and then it becomes not only a matter of what they've done, but what they might do...
 - and if you're not careful, you find yourself frozen with fear...
- here's one that's a bit unusual, but it is clearly taught in Scripture...

E. Afraid of people who are genuine or authentic.

- hypocrites and ungodly people can be very intimidated by someone who is the real thing...
- think about these verses...
 - **1 Samuel 18:29 - then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually.**
 - **Mark 6:20 - for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.**
- I certainly don't presume to know...but that could be true of someone here—where your biggest fears come out when you're around a person who really loves the Lord...because their dedication and genuineness reveals something that you don't have...

F. Afraid of telling someone the truth.

- do you remember this terrible event from the life of David?...where the baby conceived through he and Bathsheba's adultery had died...
- and because of what the servants observed in David's behavior...
 - **2 Samuel 12:18 - And the servants of David were afraid to tell him...**
- you may have something that you really need to talk to another person about, and you know that...
 - then why haven't you?...because you're afraid...

G. Afraid of people.

- **Proverbs 29:25 - The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.**
- this is the theme verse for Ed Welch's book – when people are big and God is small **[show pic of the cover]**...and think about the argument of the verse – the fear of man can trap you and motivate all sorts of poor choices...

H. Afraid of trials.

- **Jonah 1:5 - Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them.**
- and what was really a shame about that verse is that these unbelieving sailors were facing this trial because of the disobedience of one man...the prophet Jonah...who had such a calloused heart that he was down in the hold of the ship fast asleep...which proves, by the way, that never being afraid may just be the sign of a seared conscience...
- here's a big one...

I. Afraid of failure.

- this comes from the parable we often discuss during stewardship month...
- 3 different servants were given different sums of money to invest for the king...
- and when the time for accounting came, the one who had been given 5 wisely invested it and returned 5 more...

- then the one who had been given two did the same thing...and although the final amount was different, the percentage of growth was the same...and they received the same commendation...
- but the one who had been given one talent buried it in the ground?...why?...fear...
- **Matthew 25:25 - And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.**
- and how did that reasoning play out?...he was called wicked and lazy...
- how many of God's people will not try something that he really wants them to attempt...because they are afraid...believing that failing in the worst thing in the world...

J. Afraid of speaking for Christ.

- here's a sad story...the parents of the man born blind...whom Christ miraculously healed...
- **John 9:18-23 - The Jews then did not believe *it* of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."**
- I wonder how many opportunities to speak for Christ have been missed because of fear?...

K. Afraid of death.

- **Hebrews 2:15 - and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.**
- that might seem like a lot, but that's just a survey...we've just taken a few licks off the biblical ice cream cone of fear...
- but that's enough to position us to ask every person here a question...how are you doing with the matter of fear?...
- when you look in the mirror...is that what you see?...a person who is afraid?...

- here's the point of our key passage in Deuteronomy 31 – it doesn't have to be that way...God stands ready to make you a person who is strong and courageous...

II. Who You Are – Courageous

- read Deut. 31:5-8 again...

- now, this passage doesn't only tell us that we can/should be courageous—but it tells us how to do it...you can be courageous...

A. Because of your belief in God's abiding presence.

- that's what we studied last week...and it is clearly and repeatedly emphasized in this text...
- and I would just ask you – have you had opportunities this week to remind yourself that in Christ, God has befriended you, and has promised that He would never leave you or forsake you?...
- so what can we now add to that from this passage...you can also be courageous...

B. Because of your knowledge of God's Word and your commitment to following it.

- if you're familiar with Scripture, you know that this part of passage is bittersweet for Moses...

1. Moses' story.

- why?...
- because the reason he cannot lead the people into the promised land was his disobedience to God's clear directions...
- do you remember?...the people were grumbling (again) because they were without water...
 - and it was the same song they had been singing in the wilderness over and over...why did you lead us out here just to kill us with thirst....we had it better back in Egypt, blah, blah, blah...
 - and God told Moses...**Numbers 20:8 - Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.**
 - God wanted to glorify Himself by showing His patience and His power...and his instructions were quite clear...but what happened?...
- **Numbers 20:9-11 - So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.**
 - and you might say – what a man – there's courage for you – he gave those Israelites a piece of his mind...that's certainly not what God thought...
- **Numbers 20:12 - But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."**
 - sinful anger is often motivated by fear, not courage...and in this case it robbed God of the glory due His name...
 - no wonder, Moses' final instructions to the people had such a strong emphasis on fully obeying the Word of God...
 - your courage is to come from knowing that what you are doing is consistent with Scripture...that's why we see such a strong...

2. The connection between courage and biblical truth.

- **Deuteronomy 31:5-6 - The LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them...**
- **Deuteronomy 31:23-26 - Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you." It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, "Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there...**
 - that same theme is carried right into the book of Joshua...
- **Joshua 1:6-8 - Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be**

strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

- the point is – fear is connected to a heart filled with unbelief – courage is connected to a heart filled with faith in God’s revealed Word...

3. The challenge this presents for our culture.

- you may have caught the article in Monday’s paper entitled “millennials have mixed views on religion”...
- it quoted a young woman from Attica who said—“I really don’t think a religion should tell you how to live your life. I think living on earth is hell and when we die, we all go to heaven.”
- the article went on to talk about how only 31 percent of young adults pray by themselves and only 8 percent pray with others on a daily basis...
- it also reported that only 21% read their Bibles at least once a week, and 34% once a month – only 8% on a daily basis...
- no wonder we have a culture that is so gripped by fear...because of an almost complete lack of understanding of Scripture...
- if what we’ve said so far is true – then people who truly want to be growing in courage need to be taking in massive doses of Scripture...
 - that’s why this church is all about teaching the Word...not as an end in itself but certainly as a means to knowing and pleasing God...
 - that’s why your children were taught the Word in SS today...
 - that’s why we’re planning Vacation Bible School...
 - that’s why every Monday we offer Biblical counseling...
 - that’s why we have Purdue Bible Fellowship...
- but every person here has to decide – are you going to discipline your lives in such a way that you are building a foundation from which courage is derived...
- and I realize that you might say – well, I don’t like discipline, or church isn’t very fun, or reading the Bible on my own isn’t very fun...
- I’m not sure fun is one of our highest objectives here...
- **Hebrews 12:11 - All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**
- one of the new issues pastors face is that people like to send out tweets during or after the messages...
- which is fine with me, I guess – but please keep in mind that just because you think something---that doesn’t necessarily make it so...
- I was speaking last Sunday about the substitutionary death of Christ...and how the father turned His back on His own Son while Jesus bore the weight and the penalty of our sin...that doctrine is the essence of the gospel...
- “Mt 27:46 - I think traditional inturpretation of this verse is off, it appears contrary to the nature of God's faithfulness...”

- That's the culture we live in...
- I think religion shouldn't tell you how to live your life...
- I think we're all experiencing hell now on earth and when we die we all go to heaven...
- I think the traditional interpretation of the Father turning his back on His Son is off...

- if anyone is really interested in that point, I would encourage you to read John MacArthur's book – **The Murder of Jesus... "And in that awful, sacred hour, it was as if the Father abandoned Him. Though there was surely no interruption of the Father's love for Him as a Son, God nonetheless turned away from Him and forsook Him as our Substitute" (The Murder of Jesus, p. 221).**
- it is through massive doses of the Scripture that biblical courage is derived...

4. The opportunity/challenge to be disciplined in your reading of Scripture.

- this is one of the reasons we distribute a read through the Bible program at the beginning of each year (nothing super-spiritual about that, per se)
- if you've been following that plan – there have been some great stories the last couple of weeks that couple really bolster your courage...
- like when the captain of the Assyrian army comes to the people of God and starts mocking them and demanding that they surrender...
- and King Hezekiah is beside himself because of the power of the Assyrian army...
- and the prophet Isaiah comes and says to God's people – here's a message for that pagan captain... **2 Kings 19:27-28 - But I know your sitting down, and your going out and your coming in, and your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me, and because your arrogance has come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.**
- at the same time we've been reading in the NT book of Acts and watching God bless the early church as they sought to proclaim the message of the resurrected Christ...and they were so courageous they were accused of turning their city upside down with Christ's teaching...
- well, when you read stories like that from Scripture – it gives you a foundation from which courage can be derived...
- of course if these stats in the paper are to be believed...too many people aren't at the table when God is serving the meal...
- there's one other verse we have to bring into this...because it teaches that we can also be courageous...

C. Because your love for God and others supersedes your focus on self.

- **1 John 4:18 - There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.**
- Scripture causes you to focus on fulfilling the two great commandments, to love God and love others...according to this passage, that in and of itself casts out fear...because biblical love and sinful fear cannot coexist...
- now, where does all of this leave us?...

III. Who You Can Be – Overcoming Fear and Growing in Courage

A. The courage to believe.

- **Matthew 9:2 - And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven."**

- trusting Christ is not an easy decision – but this text says that understanding that God stands ready to forgive you of your sin because of His Son's finished work is an important step of courage...

B. The courage to take a bold step of obedience.

- we've talked about a lot – but some people here especially needed to be reminded of the poor steward of Matthew 25...who hid his talent in the ground because of fear of failure...

- it may be time for you to take what God has entrusted to you, and courageously invest them in ministry...

C. The courage to place death in its proper place.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 - Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.