How to Live A Courageous Christian Life

FOCUS: LIVING A FAITHFUL & COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

During Jesus' extensive ministry in Galilee, He conveyed the message of the kingdom. He worked to prepare His followers for courageous action as they practiced kingdom living. One way they learned courage was to be in situations where they needed it. Jesus commissioned them to go into the nearby villages with the gospel (Mark 6:6b-13). He endowed them with His own authority to confront evil by casting out demons and healing the sick. They went at His direction and performed the same ministry He did.

Some hearers acknowledged trust in Jesus when called on to repent. Others, however, refused. Sandwiched between the sending of the Twelve Disciples and their follow-up report to Jesus (Mark 6:30), Mark included a reminder that Jesus' message could result in strong opposition (Mark 6:14-29) by recalling the tragic demise of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. This same Antipas heard about Jesus' ministry and expressed suspicions about it and even believed He was John the Baptist risen from the dead.

When the Twelve Disciples returned to report on their experiences in ministry, Jesus proceeded to call them to express their faith in Him (Mark 6:30-52). After a failed attempt by Jesus and the Twelve to retreat from the crowds, Jesus turned His attention to the multitudes. Out of this circumstance Jesus performed two miracles that called for faith on the part of the disciples. First, He multiplied the loaves and fish to feed the crowd. Second, He walked on water in front of the disciples in trouble on the sea.

A final summary of Jesus' miraculous healings demonstrated that people can request help from the LORD in their time of need (Mark 6:53-56). Crowds continued to flock to Jesus as His popularity soared. They sought help from Him for their physical problems while ignoring their need for spiritual healing. Although this response was typical of human nature and revealed shallowness in light of their greater spiritual need, nevertheless the LORD cared for them.

All adults face situations that call for courage and perseverance and test their faith. The source of courage is conviction of faith and a fearless drive to succeed.

I have found that “fear” centers around “death” – concern over punishment, loss, and separation. If a person is not afraid of the ultimate separation, death, then every other situation one can think of is less cause for fear. The Bible tells us that ‘perfect love casts out all fear” as we are told in 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.” Thus, the love of God for us is enough reason not to fear.

Jesus said; “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of courage/confidence, I have overcome the world.” – John 16:33.

When confronted with a crisis in your life, where do you turn for help? What is the basis of the way you handle trials and negative circumstances?
THE LACK OF FAITH INHIBITS BLESSING & CAUSES GOD TO MARVEL

[1 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. 2 And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! 3 "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him. 4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house". 5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.]

If you have ever wondered what amazes God Mark records it in this passage. Only on two occasions in the Gospels is it said that Jesus marveled: once at the Gentile centurion's faith (Matthew 8:10), and once in reference to the unbelief of His hometown neighbors at Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

“And He marveled”: To me this is a truly amazing statement—that God can be ‘amazed’!

THE POWER OF GOD IS SELF-EVIDENT AND ONLY THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT TO BELIEVE WILL DENY IT.

JESUS COMMISSIONS THE TWELVE DISCIPLES [see also Luke 10]

[7 And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. 8 He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belt 9 but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. 10 Also He said to them, “In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. 11 And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!” 12 So they went out and preached that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.]

These were the instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples—He sent them out “two-by-two”. But before they went out, he teamed them up in pairs (Mark 6:7). The number “2” in the Bible represents a witness:

“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”—Deut. 19:15

“It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true.”—John 8:17

Doubtless this plan was intended to provide for his disciples' needed companionship along the way. Together they could help one another, and when adverse circumstances greeted them as surely often would be the case, they could still find solace among themselves. It reflects again the characteristic concern of Jesus for togetherness.
Note that this is a principle found in the Old Testament:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.—Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

“And they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere” [see also Luke 9:6]. The little group of disciples was finally started in the active ministry of Christ on their own.

Jesus never asks anyone to do something which He was unwilling to do. So as the disciples went out, the Master likewise “…….departed thence to teach and preach in their cities” (Matt. 11:1).

Modern missionary policies would be missing the point if they required strict, literal adherence to these instructions. However, we learn some valid principles from Jesus’ instructions to His disciples:

1. In your ministry, focus on God’s spiritual power, not on worldly goods and frills.
2. Go further and do more than your current supplies allow.
3. Worry less, trust more.
4. Keep your lifestyle simple and efficient.
5. When your mission is over, the only achievements worth talking about will be God’s mighty power and wonderful provision under all circumstances.

The disciples were not to force themselves or their message on anyone. They
- WERE TO GO IMMEDIATELY
- WERE NOT TO LINGER
- WERE TO WORK EFFICIENTLY.

Note the power that was exhibited through the disciples. They had mastery over the demons (but it was not all; e.g., Mark 9:28-29) and as many as they anointed [i.e., it was not all] with oil was healed.

JESUS EMPOWERS US TO SHARE THE GOSPEL BY TWO WITNESSES—THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD.

v. 14-29 ➢ KING HEROD’S RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE; HOW JOHN THE BAPTIST DIED

[14 Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, “John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.” 15 Others said, “It is Elijah”. And others said, “It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets.” 16 But when Herod heard, he said, “This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!” 17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. 18 For John had said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” 19 Therefore Herodias held it
against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. 21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. 22 And when Herodias’ daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” 23 He also swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” 24 So she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist!” 25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

**Mark Chapter 6**

Mark now digresses because at this point in Jesus’ earthly ministry the fame and popularity of Jesus has grown to such epic proportions that even the local ruler, Herod Antipas, can not ignore it. **Because of guilt or personal bias, people oftentimes have an inaccurate view of God.**
Some people were thinking that Jesus was ELIJAH who was prophesied to come {see Mal 4:5} while others thought He was THAT PROPHET {see Deut. 18:15, 18} who was to come. Herod Antipas even believed that Jesus is really John the Baptist raised from the dead. Why? So Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, now gives us some important background to clarify the matter and the reason for Herod to have such thoughts.

John the Baptist had rebuked Herod the Great for taking his brother’s [Philip’s] wife for his own which was unlawful. Lev 20:21 says; “If a man takes his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless.”

But in spite of John's rebuke Herod still feared and respected him, for John was so obviously a man of sincerity and of goodness; but with Herodias it was different. She was implacably hostile to John and determined to eliminate him. She got her chance at Herod's birthday feast which he was celebrating with his courtiers and his captains [Matt. 14:6-11]. Into that feast her daughter Salome came to dance.

Solo dances in the culture of those days were suggestive and licentious pantomimes full of sexual innuendo. That a princess of the royal blood should so expose and demean herself is beyond belief because such dances were the art of professional prostitutes. The very fact that she did this is a grim commentary on the character of Salome and of the mother who allowed and encouraged her to do so.

Herod was extremely pleased with and Herod offered her any reward; and thus Herodias got the chance she had plotted for so long; and John, to gratify her hatred was executed.

We meet Herod Antipas one more time in the Gospels, when he ‘tried’ Jesus and hoped to see the Lord perform a miracle (Luke 23:6-12). Jesus would not even speak to this adulterer and murderer, let alone please him by doing a miracle! Jesus called Herod Antipas a ‘fox' (Luke 13:31-35), an apt description of this crafty man. In 39 AD, Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1), nephew of Herod Antipas, denounced his uncle to the Roman emperor Caligula and Antipas was deposed and sent into exile.

v. 30-34 ➢ THE RESULTS & RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

[30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. 33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.]

APESTLE: The word "apostle" means "one sent" as a messenger, authorized agent, or missionary. The word became an accepted title for Jesus' twelve disciples after his death and resurrection (Acts 1:25-26; Ephesians 2:20). Mark deliberately used the word because the disciples had completed their teaching mission (6:7-13) and thus were official "sent ones."
After the disciples came back from their evangelistic ministry, Jesus told the disciples to take a break. He knew their weaknesses. There is only so much a person can do physically and spiritually; then the body needs rest and the soul needs refreshment. As if it were a new discovery, sports physiologists and motivational experts now preach the wisdom of hard work then adequate rest. People who hope to accomplish big goals need a balance of exercise and rest.

We do not want to become a bunch of “cranky” Christians!

Rest allows time for reflection, meditation, conversation, reading, and prayer. In all your work, take a little time to study, pray and meditate on God’s Word. Take a walk alone. Gaze and ponder at the stars. Count your blessings and thank God for each one. Sing a prayer of praise where only God can hear.

Jesus is the consummate GOOD SHEPHERD; He always takes time to show compassion and guidance to those who need it and He spends time teaching them through His Word.

v. 35-37 ➢ THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH: HOW DO WE MEET OVERWHELMING NEEDS?

[35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.” 37 But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”] {Refer to John 6:4-13}

The disciples now take personal initiative and sizing up the situation make a recommendation based purely on human logic. The masses of people have not eaten, it was late in the day and they needed to disperse the crowd so they could go and eat. This made logical sense but Jesus had other plans—for both the people and the disciples!

A denarii was approximately one day’s wage. Thus, it was estimated that it would take 200 day’s wages to feed all these people. Putting this into perspective, a person making $160 a day ($20/hr) this would amount to $32,000! Neither Jesus nor the disciples had that kind of money.

Note Jesus’ challenge to His disciples to provide the physical needs began by asking Philip a question [see John 6:5] who answered [John 6:7] by saying, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little”. They knew this was impossible so their reply was actually a sarcastic remark which mocked Philip’s reply. Even though the disciples were perhaps tired [perhaps they did not follow Jesus’ advice to ‘rest a while’ in v.31] their attitude revealed both disrespect and a serious lack of faith. Sound familiar to anyone?

When the physical and mental demands of ministry begin to affect our attitude we need to make a reality check and take a ‘deep spiritual breath’. We need to guard against becoming cynical and disrespectful in the work of the ministry. We need to remember that God does not ask us to do anything He cannot provide for. We need to pray and put our trust in the Jesus Christ who is the Great Shepherd, Counselor, Mighty God and Everlasting Father!
v. 38-44 ➢ THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH: DOING IT ‘MY’ WAY OR GOD’S WAY

[38 But He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.” 39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. 41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.]

A boy’s lunch [refer to John 6:9] was used to feed a multitude of 5000 men. It has been said that if each man there had a wife and one child with him there were actually more like 15,000 people feed. Note how it was organized.

Jesus had the people sit down in ranks; i.e., literally ‘garden beds’, like rows of corn stalks of fifties and hundreds. It was all very orderly and intended to optimize the distribution of food and pass it out relatively quickly and efficiently. All the disciples had to do was walk down between these rows and hand out the bread and fish which kept multiplying as it was passed along the rows of people!

Note that there were 12 baskets of bread and fish left over—one basket per disciple!

You do not need to comprehend God’s supernatural power and grace to experience it and obey Him. The LORD’s thoughts are not our thoughts neither are His thoughts our thoughts.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.—Isaiah 55:8-9

Can you think of a time when you knew of a need but gave up on meeting it because you did not think you had the resources? What does this passage teach you to do in such a circumstance?

Even though you give away your resources, God’s blessing to you will always be multiplied over. There will always be enough left-over to meet your own needs!

Do you remember a time in your life as a Christian when you were challenged to obey God? How did God’s Word, faith, prayer and other believers play a part in resolving the issue?
v. 45-52 ➢ Faith is Tested Under Stressful Conditions

[45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. 46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. 47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. 48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. 49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” 51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. 52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.]

Even though Mark does not give the reason for Jesus’ immediate departure from the place where He fed the multitude the Gospel of John does. In John 6:14-15 we are told; “Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Jesus’ knew He would be crowned King of kings and LORD of lords but it would be His timing and not man’s. Matter of fact, we learn from John 6:26-29:

Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

The wind began blowing against the disciples in the boat which was in miles from shore on the Sea of Galilee. We are told that they were straining; literally ‘being battered’. The Greek word used here can also mean ‘tortured’ or ‘in torment’. The word for ‘rowing’ literally means ‘driving’. Even though many of the disciples were fishermen, they were really having a tough time staying on top of the storm.

The ‘fourth watch’ started at 3:00 AM and lasted until 6:00 AM so this was very early in the morning (we are not told if the disciples had gotten any sleep). Jesus saw their predicament and came walking on the water next to the boat which was 3-4 miles from shore {John 6:19}. Jesus acted as if He was going to pass them by. Why? I think it was to test their faith under a stressful situation.

Notice Jesus’ wonderful greeting: “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Literally Jesus said, “It is I myself, I am.” In other words Jesus was telling the disciples He was the Great “I Am” who addressed Moses in Exodus 3:14; And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Thus, Jesus’ self-identification expressed His deity as Jehovah God! The disciples were greatly astonished, beyond measure—even though they had seen this before [when Jesus reproves their fear and lack of faith]. In Mark 4:35-41 Jesus calms the storm by a command; here He calms the wind by getting into the boat.
In John 6:17, 21 we are told that as soon as the disciples willingly received Jesus into the boat not only did the storm stop, but they were immediately at the shore were they were going—near Capernaum.

We are told that the reason the disciples were so greatly astonished [we might say that it ‘blew their minds’], lit. “out of mind”, was that they had not fully grasped the power and significance of the feeding about 5000 men with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes. And so their hearts were hardened!

Stop and think about it. Jesus created matter from nothing and demonstrated that He has the power of Creation; of all things seen and unseen! Surely Jesus can walk on the water and having demonstrated this before the disciples should not have been “…..greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure and marveled.” We are told in Col. 1:14-18 that:

“……in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Unfortunately, the disciples’ hearts had been hardened because they had taken the most recent miracle for granted. Therefore they lacked the spiritual perception needed accept the fact that Jesus was able to come to their boat walking on the water. They had not learned the previous lesson of Jesus’ power and compassion.

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This is a lesson to us: To remember the power and goodness of the LORD and not act like as if we have never seen it. If we forget we will miss out on the blessing God wants to give us.

Whether its God’s Word giving us a promise or direction or we acknowledge the presence of the LORD with us, the LORD calms the ‘storms’ in our own lives. This encouragement should cause us to take courage amidst our trials and struggles here on earth!

How does your trust in God’s presence, power and compassion help you?

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1 In John 2:1-11 Jesus manifested His glory by converting ordinary water into wine demonstrating that He has the power to create; in this case wine molecules (sugars and alcohol) from water molecules.
v. 53-56 ➢ **Jesus Christ Meets the Needs of All People**

[53 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, 55 ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. 56 Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.]

Jesus is always at work in the world and His mercy, grace and compassion never fail even though many people seek Jesus with the wrong motives.

**Conclusions:**

(1) We courageously express our faith in the face of others' needs when we recognize our responsibility and do what we can to help,

(2) We courageously express our faith when we obey God and take actions that show we are trusting Him.

(3) We courageously express our faith in Jesus Christ during any distressful situation by trusting Him because of who He is and what He can do.

**Bibliography**


