

## "The Demands Of Courage"

In the early morning hours of February 25, 1956, future Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev stood before a closed session of the Twentieth Party Congress in what became known as the "Secret Speech." During the speech, Khrushchev denounced late Premier Joseph Stalin's abuse of power and repressive style of leadership. For Khrushchev, who had played an intimate role in Stalin's corruption, it was a moment of truth and cleansing. However, while he was speaking, a note was passed through the audience and up to Khrushchev which asked, "What were you doing when Stalin committed all these atrocities?" Khrushchev shouted, "Who sent up that note?" Not a person moved or spoke a word. Khrushchev shouted again, "I'll give him one minute to stand up!" The one minute of time passed and still no one moved. Khrushchev then said, "All right, I'll tell you what I was doing. I was doing exactly what the writer of this note was doing – exactly nothing! I was afraid to be counted."

From time-to-time, flags are flown at half mast around our country. It is a reminder to us that someone important has died. Perhaps the reason our generation of Christians are flying the flags of their profession so lowly is because something vitally important is dying within our ranks. When you compare our twenty-first century brand of Christianity with that possessed by first century Christians you can easily see that courage is dying a slow death. Courage is no longer demand from our leaders, and our leaders no longer demand courage from us. Our lack of courage is both our failure and our fault. As Joshua assumed the leadership role after Moses' death, the Lord encouraged him in Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage..." God has the right to both command and demand courage from the lives of those who serve as His ambassadors. In our generation, there are mad Pharaohs we must face, mighty giants we must fight, and many steep mountains we must climb. The challenges and struggles that lie ahead of us can only be met with "good courage." Do you have the mettle it takes to keep standing tall when everyone else around you has already sat down?

Courage is a trait that demands **we hold no reserves**. In Daniel 6, when Daniel defied the decree of King Darius and prayed, he not only exposed himself to the potential of peril and pain, but he also laid his position and popularity on the line. For Daniel, spiritual courage was never a risk because a man who has surrendered the whole of his life into the hands of God no longer has anything to lose! Several years ago, a missionary in India watched as a woman approached the Ganges River with a crippled son in her arms and a healthy son by her side. To his amazement, she sacrificed her healthy son into the crocodile infested waters. When asked why she had not sacrificed her crippled son instead, she replied, "In our country we always give our gods our best." If only more Christians had such faith! Saul kept "the best of the sheep and of the oxen...and all that was good" for himself, but lost his courage, his mind, and ultimately his kingdom. Ananias and Sapphira "kept back part" of the offering for themselves, but lost their reward, their credibility, and ultimately their lives. Nineteenth century evangelist George Mueller said, "God judges what we give by what we keep." Anytime we are holding back something from God, it might just

surprise us what God is holding back from us!

Courage is a trait that demands **we honor no retreats**. In Nehemiah 6, when enemy messengers tried to distract, discourage, and defeat the project of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah said, "...I cannot come down..." He kept pressing forward and refused to back off, back up, or back down! Spiritual progress is never achieved from hearts that are always moving backwards. During the heat of a difficult battle, Napoleon shouted to his drummer, "Beat a retreat!" Standing heroic and saluting loyally, the drummer said, "Sir, you never taught me to beat a retreat. I can only beat a charge!" With renewed courage, Napoleon then shouted, "Then beat a charge, drummer boy!" A sure defeat was quickly turned to victory. Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather a fixed resolve in the face of panic. Because David refused to run from the intimidating shadow of Goliath, he became the tallest man left on the battlefield. Because the three Hebrew children would not budge on their conviction, they could not be not beaten, blemished, or burned. When his enemies demanded that he recant his writings, Martin Luther said, "Here I stand! I can do no other! God help me." True faith does not commit in the face of confirmation, but rather it surrenders and presses forward in spite of the consequence.

Courage is a trait that demands **we harbor no regrets**. In Esther 4, Israel is facing annihilation and only Queen Esther is in a position to save them. After weighing out the consequences, Esther says in verse 16, "...I will go in unto the king...and if I perish, I perish." That's living with your mind made up! Twentieth century pastor and author Clarence Macartney once wrote, "Men who hesitate and linger are left behind by the men who have decided and who bind what shall be to their will." Life can often produce sudden and strategic moments that demand our courage. However, to delay or hesitate in that moment can leave you holding a lifetime of regret. Lot had the chance to leave Sodom courageously, but "while he lingered," he lost the respect of his family. David had the chance to be courageous on the battlefield, but while he "tarried still at Jerusalem," the enemy pierced his soul with a sword that ran throughout his family. Gifted preacher Tom Elliff recently reminded me of an old saying, "A man knows he is growing old when his regrets outnumber his dreams." The courageous are never guaranteed fame and fortune, but cowards never have monuments erected in honor either.

In his 1978 Harvard Commencement address, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said, "Must one point out that from ancient times a decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?" Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with Me is against Me..." The implication is clear that a third position of neutrality is not given to us! As Christians, we would do well to adopt the motto used many years ago by the French Foreign Legion: "If I falter, push me on. If I stumble, pick me up. If I retreat, shoot me." Can the Lord count on you?

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