

Courage Begins with a Single Step

By Bobby Schuller

It takes courage to be a great person and to do great things with God, and courage begins with a single step. You know things, sometimes, when in our spiritual lives don't always make sense. We believe, especially in this church, that God is for you, He's not against you. We believe God has the victory for you. We believe God is going to get you through what you're going through, but often in that process we can feel confused when bad things happen, and we can wonder where is God in the midst of all of this?

And I have a very dramatic but true answer to that looming question, and the answer is this is war. And what I mean by that is we are not, as Christians, in a physical war, we're in a spiritual war. There is a spiritual fight going on over your soul and over the destiny of the world and we know Jesus Christ has won, and will win. Yet, we still are in the midst of a real spiritual struggle. I've been on enough missionary trips, I've seen enough miracles, I have seen enough crazy spiritual things to believe with all my heart this is a spiritual battle. And I don't understand it. I simply trust.

In the Bible, the book of Daniel, there's this story where Daniel is praying to God for three weeks and is not getting a response. And nothing's happening and he's wondering what's going on. And one day, an angel appears before him so terrifying that everybody that's with

Daniel runs away and Daniel stands there sort of paralyzed. And the angel says, essentially, Daniel, God sent me here to you but I was delayed, the Bible says, because the Prince of Persia (we think of that as like a demon or something) that this thing was stopping me and so we were fighting. And I had to fight him to get to you, and we were at an impasse. And so Arc Angel Michael came and aided me and helped me break through so that I could get through, and we had the victory, and now I'm here to tell you this message from God.

Now that story doesn't make any sense to me at all. I do not get that. But what I do gather from that story is that there is a lot going on in the spiritual realms that we don't always get, maybe because it's super weird. I mean we just don't understand it. And a part of living as a believer when we have crystal clear eyes to see in this world, but at best a foggy vision of the spiritual world that impacts this world, we are called to live with trust, to grow in knowledge and to act with courage. To be brave. And you are brave! And I'm proud of you. Because war requires courage. And war, I know, is a word that's taboo but it's exactly what it is. We are fighting on the side of light against the darkness.

And so whatever it is that you're bringing to God today, face it with courage and step towards the thing you're afraid of, not away. Courage is doing what you are afraid to do. And courage says I'm going to move not away from but in the direction of the thing that scares me, and that's who you are. That's what courage is. It's doing what you're afraid to do.

You're so brave. You have so much heart and that's what.. the word courage is rooted in the French word "coeur" – to have heart. To have heart! To have guts! To face what it is that's coming after you.

So what do you have coming after you? You have a surgery? Do you have a sick kid? Maybe it means standing up to a bully. Maybe you fear courage this week is going to be having that talk that you've needed to have for a long time with that particular person. Maybe courage is asking a girl for her phone number. Whatever it is, I know this: an extraordinary life requires extraordinary courage, and you have it and I'm proud of you. You're not afraid, you're not a weakling, you're strong and you will step in the direction of the thing you're afraid of and you will have the victory. And that's what makes it so sweet, the victory, right? The victory. You're going to have the victory. Step in the direction of the thing you're afraid of because it's the only thing standing between you and your victory in Jesus' name.

His name is the name that gives us courage. If anything can give you courage, let it be the bravest human being that has ever lived – Jesus Christ. God in the flesh, Jesus still was human, struggled, had all of the temptations that we have, and I believe including fear. Why do I believe that? Well, just look at the prayer in Gethsemane. But He acted in spite of those feelings of fear, angst or whatever you want to call it. Jesus is the epitome of what it means to be courageous. To live every moment bravely against the thing you're afraid of for the sake of another, or for

the good. Jesus was courageous and that's the message today when we remember the story of Him entering into Jerusalem.

Have you ever had something you've dreaded for awhile and maybe you know that feeling? Maybe it was finals week in high school or college, or maybe you just knew something bad was going to happen in a week, or maybe you had to give a speech you didn't want to give, or it's just something you were dreading; worried about. I often think that Jesus had those feelings when He thought about the cross. I think He did. Did He dread it? Was it bothering Him? Was it nagging? I think it did. And He overcomes that worry and that fear when He enters Jerusalem.

A lot of people don't know this, but the story of Lazarus and entering Jerusalem are essentially connected into one narrative in the gospel of John. In John, we have this story. There are three people: Lazarus, Mary and Martha. And the three of them are siblings and they're friends with Jesus. And Jesus gets word that Lazarus is sick. They said come heal Lazarus and Jesus delays for two days. Finally, it's like He just comes to it and He says we have to go to Bethany to heal Lazarus.

Now here's something you need to know. This is towards the end of the story of the gospels, Jesus is already getting famous, and He knows if you go to Jerusalem, you're going to die; you're going to get crucified. So He knows this. He's carrying this worry with him. And Bethany, where Lazarus lives, is like a suburb of Jerusalem. It's one and a half miles

from the city. It's a twenty-minute walk. And so it's basically going to Jerusalem when you go to Bethany. Not quite, but very close.

And so He says to his disciples, guys, we got to go heal Lazarus. And they say to Him, if we go there, they're going to kill you. And almost somberly Jesus looks at them and says our friend Lazarus is sleeping. I need to go and wake him. And then still trying to talk Him out of it, they say but rabbi, if he's sleeping, I mean you want a sick guy to sleep. Don't wake him up. He's sick. Won't he get well? And then the Bible says He just told those knuckleheads plainly, He said Lazarus is dead.

And then you kind of catch that there's this silence. Lazarus, they're all friends with him, is dead. Jesus wants to go there, they're not sure why, and you can get this looming sense like Jesus is going to die. Are we going to get the ax, too? And I always love this because its Thomas Didymus, also known as Doubting Thomas because of his response later in this story, one of the bravest and one of my favorite characters in the Bible, he looks at the disciples and he says let us go that we may die with Him. Yes! I love that! That's courage. That's heart. And you don't see the disciples' response, but you can see they're kind of like alright.

So they go to Bethany. And when they get there, Lazarus has been dead for four days. And because he was a super popular guy, there were a lot of Jews there, and they were all mourning and weeping. There could have been hundreds, maybe thousands of people there. His sister Martha

comes out to Jesus, totally broken up, and she says Lord, if you'd just been here, you could have saved my brother. He says to her, Martha, your brother will rise again. And she kind of says I know, I know, he will rise again in the last day of the resurrection. He looks at her and He says I am the resurrection and the life! Anyone who believes in me will not die but will surely live forever. Pull the stone away. They say, Lord, we can't pull the stone away. He already stinks. That's what the bible says. He's been dead for four days and we live in a desert. Pull the stone away! And they do and He says Lazarus, come forth. With hundreds of people there, who are there to mourn his death, who are there for a dirge, weeping. Lazarus comes out in his burial clothes and starts tearing them off and the last thing comes off is that thing from his face and he's eye to eye with Jesus, his best friend, and he is alive and everybody freaks out.

Word spreads like crazy. It's the last huge miracle Jesus does and everybody hears about it. It gets to the temple priests and the Pharisees. And they say we need to kill this guy. Why? In the scriptures, it says we're afraid that He'll become so popular that Rome will take the temple away from us. And then there's this bizarre story where a guy named Caiaphas, who was the high priest, who I assume doesn't like Jesus, prophesied that Jesus would have to die to unite and heal the Jewish people. And on that basis, they go searching for Him to capture Him, kill Him and torture Him.

At this point, Jesus then, because there's all these people that are.. He's like to them.. I mean they don't know what this is, but He's getting mobbed. So He withdraws to a city called Ephraim in the wilderness, and there He waits. He waits for the time of His crucifixion. Out in the wilderness, just praying, just seeking God's face. Did He feel dread? I think so. Maybe a little bit. But He knew that God would raise Him from the dead. He knew He would have the victory but He knew He would have to face the cross, which theologically wasn't just physical torture and public humiliation; they were hung naked. There was no loin cloth or anything. They were beaten. But also we believe that Jesus took on His very body all the shame, sins, pain, loss of every moment of every human being throughout history past, present and future in one single moment, so powerful it caused an earthquake when He died. That's a lot of pain. And He knows it. He's so brave.

And so He goes to Bethany again to visit His now resurrected friend Lazarus, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, and they throw a meal in His honor and Mary washes His feet with her hair and perfume to prepare Him for His death. And there hundreds or maybe thousands of people are gathered to see Jesus because at this point it's now Passover. This is what He's waiting for; one of the highest holidays in Judaism, and historians estimate that there are between 500,000 to two million people gathered in the little city of Jerusalem, which is a lot

back.. I mean it's a lot today, but it was a lot back then. And everybody's asking is Jesus going to come? Is Jesus going to come?

After the celebration of the resurrection of Lazarus, all these people who are asking did He really raise you from the dead? Did this really happen? And hundreds of people are like we were there, we saw it. It was just a few days ago. It was crazy. They start as a mob walking towards Jerusalem and a sea of people almost starts walking into the city, and it is that step that Jesus takes in Jerusalem, bravely, to face the cross. Everybody is smiling, everybody is saying hosanna. I don't think Jesus is smiling. I think He knows what is coming, but He faces it. He faces it. He takes one step across the portal of Jerusalem and He knows He will never go back.

But He also knows the power, the love and the faithfulness of the Father that even if He dies the Father would raise Him from the dead. Tremendous story, isn't it? And after that, you see that those disciples carry their whole lives, most of them also martyred, at just a deep sense of courage in the face of everything the enemy throws at them. They saw Lazarus raised from the dead and even more importantly, they saw Jesus raised from the dead and they knew; they knew!

Being a disciple means having courage. It doesn't mean you're fearless, it means you're going to be scared a lot but you're going to choose to go in the direction of the thing that scares you. God will call you to do scary things. You will be brave and have the victory. Courage

begins with a single step. And can I tell you being courageous in a scary world is the only way to live? Society gives you the opposite message. Society wants you to be safe all the time. Society is constantly telling you to be afraid of this, be afraid of that whether its news, or politicians, or your next door neighbor, or some folks at church, people are always wanting you to do the safe thing. That is not the way to live. Yes, we want to be safe sometimes and we always want to be wise, but think about the last time you did something kind of courageous or brave you probably felt more alive than you ever did when you did something safe. Even if it was stupid you still felt alive!

I had that experience with my brother Anthony. We used to go.. Chris Jensen, who's here, he and I and a bunch of guys, we used to do this thing once a year called the coastal challenge where we'd start at Dana Point Harbor and we would go from there to Laguna Beach.. how far is that, Chris? Nine miles, he says. Okay so its nine miles, but it's like nine treacherous miles, too. It's not like paved. You're going sometimes along the beach, the sand, but other times its rocks and you've got to swim through rocks or climb rocks. We found that swimming through rocks was really a bad idea. Sometimes you get beat around. We had one guy got his chest kind of scraped up and another guy who busted his toe and it was bleeding the whole time, but we felt alive. I mean young guys are this way.

And one of the greatest moments was this time when my brother was like why do you want to swim all around those rocks? We'll just climb up this hill and there's a great place you can just jump off into the water. It's not that high. So we're like oh that's a great idea. Let's go.

So we get up there, we're climbing, we get up, and it's not a hill, it's a cliff. We get up there and it is like Golden Gate Bridge, jump to your death kind of high. We are up there on this cliff and I'm in the front with my brother. He's like here it is, you jump off of this. And it was like (MAKING WIND SOUNDS). We were talking about it how high it was, and we debated somewhere between 40 to 60 feet, which I don't know if you've ever jumped off a high board like at a pool. They're usually ten or 15 feet, and you look from the bottom you're like that's kind of high, that's not so bad, and you get up there and you're like oh my goodness. Okay that's ten feet. Sixty feet. Or forty, I don't know. Around there.

I look at Anthony and I go Anthony, if you jump from this thing, you're going to get hurt or die. And Anthony.. I go, if you jump off this thing, you're going to either get hurt or you're going to die, and Anthony goes, no, its fine. You can do it. Trust me. And I was like Anthony, you can't jump off this thing. And as I'm saying Anthony you can't, imagine you're me and I'm my brother Anthony. I go, I'm like Anthony you can't, and he goes.. and off the cliff he goes.. he does a full 180 like as he's falling. And I look down, he's still falling and he looks up and he's like I'm okay! And then being boys, we all know that the longer you take to

decide something like shall I jump from this cliff, the less likely it is that you'll do it, and the more likely it is that you'll become the world's big coward of the week. So all of us, like lemmings, just.. shoop, shoop, shoop, shoop, shoop, we're jumping off and I jumped off and I was fine.

Now I felt so alive, even though I was beat up, bruised, all of us eating pizza at the end, we actually were alive which was good, but doing brave things like jumping off of cliffs into the ocean and things like that are some of most spectacular moments of our lives. We feel so mastered by scary things; pushed around, controlled by the things we fear. And Jesus tells us well if you live by faith, you can move a mountain. Courage is stepping into Jerusalem, stepping toward the very thing you're afraid of, and you will. That's your character. You've got heart. You've got coeur - courage. To be courageous means to be alive.

Naturally, after a story about jumping off a cliff, you might ask well hey Bobby, what's the difference between courage and stupidity? That's a good question. I'm glad you asked. That's a good question. Courage, unlike stupidity, is rooted in knowledge. Just because you have the knowledge doesn't mean it's not scary.

I remember my first ropes course. Have you ever been on that? A ropes course? It's terrible. It's a horrible experience. You look so silly. They give you this harness and you've got two ropes, you got a helmet, and you feel like a baby in like a jumper and you're supposed to walk as

a team building exercise across this gauntlet that'll sometimes be 120 feet in the air. And you know you're safe, you're completely safe. Like nobody ever gets hurt and nor would they. You're so safe and yet your whole body kicks into gear like don't do this, don't you dare do this. Courage is rooted in knowledge and the knowledge that I'm going to be okay allows me to step out. But it's not enough. Courage is the thing that says I'm going to take that first step. Courage is rooted in knowledge.

I remember when I moved to Oklahoma, I was about 15, and my parents made the wise decision of taking me to a horror movie called "Twister." Is that what it was called? A movie about how giant tornados kill people. The movie was filmed in Oklahoma, and then we're moving there! Get a lay of the land? So I had this looming fear of tornados for a long time. I would have dreams about tornados. I still have dreams about tornados from time to time. And so I had this like fear of tornados and I had it up in through college. I remember when we first moved there, there was these humungous storms. If you live in Oklahoma or the Midwest, you know. I mean we've never had a storm like that here in California. I mean thunder, lightning, bolts of lightning hitting outside your house over and over. It was crazy. Anyway.

So then I went to go speak at this church in college and I went with a friend of mine, Don, and we're staying at the pastor's house. And its storming bad. And we're looking on TV it says tornado warning. That means there's a funnel cloud or something in the area, and my heart is

starting to race a little bit because now this thing that I've been afraid of for a long time is upon me. And I think the pastor could see that I was afraid. I was a young guy; I was like 18. He looks at me and he goes, "Bobby, don't even worry about it. If there's going to be a tornado you'd hear a siren." And I swear it was like you were in a movie. As soon as he said that, (SIREN) a cop car goes flying down the street and then I'm like.. and the funniest thing was Don and this pastor, both Oklahoman's, all they did was just laugh.

So then they take his wife and his kids, and for safety's sake, they put them in the basement, and then they go out onto their porch to see if they can find the tornado. They turn and look with me and the pastor, I kid you not, looks at me and goes, "You can go downstairs with the ladies, if you'd like."

So I go outside; I took one step in the direction of the thing I was afraid of, and I stood on that porch and the pastor goes, "Oh, oh there it is. Out there, see?" And you see this tiny little thing in this cloud and it goes (BOOP)(BOOP) gone. And Don goes, "It's an F-1. It's not a big deal." I was like what does that even mean? It's a tornado. He's like, "Well you got your F-1 and you got your F-5 and you got your F-3." He's like.. he goes, "It's just a little tornado. It won't hurt anybody. You grab a tree and you'd be fine." That's not true, by the way. That's a very Oklahoma thing to say.

And the reason I tell you that story is that their lack of fear of that particular tornado was in the knowledge of how small it was, and that tornados really aren't that dangerous, most of the time. Now there's some that can be brutal, but in this case a little F-1 funnel cloud, it was still probably not super smart, but they just weren't worried because they'd experienced probably hundreds of tornados living out in the boonies of Oklahoma. Just wasn't a big deal for them. They're like oh, if it gets close enough, I'll just go in the shelter, I guess.

You see fear; fear is very often legitimate, but sometimes we're way more afraid than we need to be. And the difference between courage and bravery is courage is rooted in knowledge. And in 2008 and 2009, Warren Buffet said put your money in the stock market. This is the time to get rich. Warren Buffet's the wealthiest man in the world, sometimes. It's always changing. But he's considered the greatest investor of all time. And he said lots of people have bet against America. They've always failed. He said bet on America – invest in the stock market. Most people didn't, and everybody was terrified. But there were a few unicorns that said at the very bottom, I'm going to buy some stock. And those people would have made a lot of money. To be courageous at that time would have been to do something scary but rooted in knowledge and Warren Buffet, being the most knowledgeable investor of all time, had great advice. Some followed it, some didn't. But courage is rooted in knowledge.

Again, it doesn't mean it's not scary. Taking one step towards the thing you're afraid of, just because you know you're going to have the victory doesn't make the fear go away. It still makes it difficult. And very often what we do is instead of taking a step in the direction of the thing we're afraid of, we don't run away, but we get busy on other things. We do a little bit of this and we do a little bit of that, we keep going, and somehow that makes us feel like I'll get around to it, but right now I'm kind of busy. And our busyness becomes avoidance. It's a way we avoid fulfilling our destiny because the only thing between you and your destiny is the thing you are busy avoiding. The only thing between you and your destiny is that big thing you're afraid of. God called you to do it because it's scary and nobody else will. And that's why disciples must have heart. Heart to move in the direction of the violent, crazy, scary thing they're afraid of rooted in the knowledge of God's character. God is faithful, He is strong enough, He is loving, He will give you the victory, but it doesn't mean it won't be hard work, and it doesn't mean it won't be scary.

So whatever you're facing, my friends, I want you to know the word from God to you is don't stay busy, don't avoid, don't procrastinate, take one small step in the direction of that big thing you're afraid of. Sometimes that's all it takes. And I want you to know the victory is going to be yours. It's overwhelming to think about whatever it is that you're facing. If you look at the whole thing, sometimes, it can be very

worrisome, but remember the wise words of a wise man long ago who said – a thousand mile journey begins with a single step. That’s right. Just take one step in the direction of the thing you’re afraid of and God will give you the victory. Amen?

I don’t want to let you leave here today, especially in a sermon about courage, without giving you the opportunity to know Jesus Christ. And so today I’m not going to keep you here long, I just want to offer you the chance. Maybe you come to church today and you know if my heart stopped beating today, I mean are you at peace with God? I believe the first act of becoming a believer is an act of courage. It’s acknowledging that you need God in front of others.

And so I’m going to invite you in just a moment to stand and acknowledge that you need to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior. And by doing this, God says anybody who acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge before the Father, but anyone who denies me before men I will deny before the Father.

And so would you stand just where you are right now, if you want me to pray with you to receive the Lord this morning. Just right where you are. You need to receive the Lord in your life today, stand up. We want to pray with you. Today’s going to be a different day for you.

And so church we’re going to say this together and if you’re standing at church, would you just extend a hand towards these people that are standing this morning and you, friends, just hold your hands

out like this to receive grace from God and all of us, let's pray this together. Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner. I am the righteousness of Christ. I am chosen, blessed, called. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Forgive me of my sins. Teach me to walk as Jesus walked in Jesus' name, amen. Let's give them a hand. Stay standing! We love you guys!

Father, thank you for all you're doing. We love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.