

## BE STRONG AND OF A GOOD COURAGE

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“BE strong and of a good courage” was the word of God to Joshua as the children of Israel were about to cross Jordan, and to enter the promised land, and this is his word to every one who enters his service. “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed.” And then he gives the reason, “For the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” “I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

There is nothing more certain than that the Most High rules in the affairs of men, and in the lives of those whose endeavor is to serve him, there is nothing more insisted upon than the unqualified recognition of this fact. The Saviour says the Father feedeth the fowls of the air. “Are ye not much better than they?” And the lilies of the field he clothes with more glory than all that in which Solomon was arrayed in the height of his wealth, grandeur, and power, then, “How much more shall he clothe you.” One sparrow, worth less than a cent, “shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” “Fear not ye therefore, *ye are of more value than many sparrows.*” We need not multiply these strong assurances of the Lord’s care for his people, except to assert the all o’ershadowing one given by Paul “He that *spared not his own Son*, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Rom. 8:32. If God’s care for men led him to give his only begotten Son, for *his enemies* (Rom. 5:10), having given him, how shall he not *with him* freely give all things *to his friends*? (John 15:14.) Will he freely give the greatest possible gift, and withhold the least? No, no! “All things are yours; and ye are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.” 1 Cor. 3:23.

It is plain therefore that to be without courage is to be without faith for the Christian to become discouraged is simply to lose confidence in the goodness, the care, the love, and the promises of God. Yet how often we hear the plaint, “I am almost discouraged,” expressed in a tone that plainly shows that the “almost” part of it is superfluous. But to all such the Lord says, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; . . . I will be with thee; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.” Christ is our example in this as in everything else. He was despised and rejected of men, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the faces of men were hid from him, and by

them he was not esteemed. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Yet in full view of all this it was written of him, "He shall not fail *nor be discouraged*." Isa. 42:4. And having passed through it all, his last words to his disciples before going over the brook Cedron were, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

This is the direct consequence of not being discouraged. If we yield to discouragement we never can overcome. If Satan can only succeed in turning our attention away from the Lord and his goodness and ever-ready help, and so get us into doubt and distrust and thus into discouragement, he knows that his part of the battle is won. Our privilege is therefore to be strong *in the Lord* and in the power of *his might*. To put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. And it is with the shield of *faith* that we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Of faith, not of doubt; and if faith, then *courage*; and if faith and courage, then *victory*. "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage." And "thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," *who never was discouraged*.

From the scattered, lonely ones how often there come such expressions as follows: "It is hard to be a Christian alone." "It is hard to live out the truth alone." "It is hard to keep the Sabbath alone." "I love the truth, but I cannot do much alone." Now we have strong sympathy for these persons, and in our prayers we make mention of all such, but at the same time we are perfectly satisfied that there is a different, and much better way of looking at the matter than to always consider it a "hard" thing to do this or that, in the circumstances which surround us. Wherever you are, that is the only place in which you can serve the Lord. If you are alone, the only possible way for you to serve the Lord, is to serve him alone. And if you be alone, and the providence of God does not ordain otherwise, is it not best to accept the situation cheerfully and make the most of it? Because that is the only situation in this wide world in which you can obey the truth, and if you obey it at all you must obey it there; if you be a Christian at all you must be one right where you are.

The idea that a great many have, is often expressed: "I love the truth, but I cannot do much alone." You can do your duty, and that is all the Lord asks you to do. And that you must do alone, for no person can do it for you. And doing your duty is all that you can do for yourself, or for the cause of God. Many a time it happens in the life of

a Christian that the greatest honor, and the greatest service, that he can possibly do his Lord is done singly and alone. To illustrate: After the battle of Waterloo, as the allied armies were marching to Paris, Blucher determined, against the will of Wellington, to blow up the bridge of Jena, because it stood as a monument of the defeat of the Prussian arms. When he had actually begun to mine the bridge, so as to lay his train to blow it up, Wellington placed an English sentinel on the bridge and went ahead. "A single sentinel. *He was the British nation*; and if Blucher had blown up the bridge, the act was to be held as a rupture with Great Britain."

Suppose now, that soldier had made the plea that is made by some professed soldiers of the cross of Christ—I love my king, I love his cause, but I cannot do much alone. Would it not have been a miserable plea? He was placed there alone, and if he did anything at all he must do it alone. More, in that place, alone though he was, he represented the kingdom of Great Britain, and he was to stand in his place on that bridge as the representative of his sovereign and his kingdom. So it is with the Christian. He represents his Sovereign and his kingdom. And if his Sovereign chooses him, and puts him in a certain place alone, in that place he is the kingdom of God, and what greater honor can his King bestow? And cannot the soldier of Christ stand in his place, as well as did this English soldier in his? Cannot the representative of the kingdom of God prove faithful to his trust, as did the representative of the kingdom of England to his? Is it not more important that he should? Are you a soldier of Christ? Are you alone? Then put on the whole armor of God and stand faithfully.

It is recorded of Abraham that he was the friend of God. But how did it come about that God could speak of Abraham as "my friend"? It was because Abraham when left alone was faithful to God. The world had proven false to God. Even Abraham's own father and relatives were idolaters. It came to pass that God wanted friends in the world, and Abraham alone was found keeping the commandments of God and obeying his voice; and thus proving himself faithful when all around him were recreant, the God of Heaven and earth calls him "Abraham, my friend." Now, once more the Lord wants friends. His word is despised, and his law is trampled under foot. Who now will walk in the steps of that faith which our father Abraham had? Are you alone in the midst of those who will not keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus? Then show yourself a friend of God by keeping them so much the more faithfully for being alone. Yea, let all

of us be faithful soldiers of Christ. Let all of us be friends of God. Let all of us be strong and of a good courage.

GOD called Gideon to rid Israel of their foes, the Midianites and Amalekites. Gideon had received abundant proof that the Lord was with him. Yet when he came upon the brow of the hill, with only three hundred men, and looked down on the host in the valley below, "like locusts for multitude," and knew that on the morrow he must meet them in conflict, he trembled. He knew that he and his handful of men were no match for that great army. True, God had said, "I *have* delivered it [the host] into thine hand," but he couldn't see how, and therefore it couldn't be. In the night season, while in this discouraged condition, the Lord appeared to him, and in substance said, "I know you are discouraged—you do not believe what I have told you. Take your servant and go a little way down toward the enemy's camp, and there you will hear something that will give you courage." Gideon did as commanded, and there he heard one of the men relate a dream he had had, which was interpreted by his companion to mean that into Gideon's hand "hath God delivered Midian and all the host." This was enough. Immediately the two returned, and at once set about executing a plan of attack, given by divine direction, and the result was that the enemy was routed, the foremost ones were slain, and the whole host was delivered into his hands. Judges 6, 7.

How many times in the life of many Christians there come seasons of depression. Temptations press sore; reverses come; the purest motives are misconstrued; the most unselfish acts are criticized; and for the truth's sake, even their dearest friends forsake them. They know that up to this time the Lord has led them—they are sure of it—yet how hard to believe that he still is going before them. They think, as did Jacob, "All these things are against me," and perhaps murmur and complain.

Then right in the midst of their bitterest sorrow and deepest grief, there comes a turn in affairs. The dark clouds roll away, the apparently insurmountable obstacles vanish, and what were looked upon as mountains of difficulty prove to be not mountains at all. And all this, though unexpected, comes in such a natural way, that it never occurs to them that it is God who has brought it all about.

When will Christians learn that in times of darkness they are to look up and not down. Though cast down, they are not forsaken. God's people are more precious in his sight than fine gold (Isa. 13:12), and he never willingly afflicts, even though he permits them to pass

through the “furnace of affliction.” Even here he suffers none to be tempted above that they are able to bear.

“We know,” says the apostle, “that *all* things work together for good to them that love God.” Now anyone would undergo, without a murmur, the pain of the surgeon’s knife, if he knew that it was the only means of saving his life. So when Christians, in their experience, actually know this truth, how easy it becomes to bear the severest trials; and not only to bear them, but even welcome them, for it is only through “much tribulation” that anyone can be fitted for eternal life.

“I AM so weak, and have so much to overcome, that I am almost discouraged.” How often do we hear this expression in social meeting. It is the burden of some testimonies. It seems as though some people think that there is special merit in depreciating themselves. They almost take pride in their humility. Others do not seem to know that there is any better way for them to do. But however true it may be, or however often it is repeated, it cannot but be displeasing to God. We are commanded to “exhort one another,” and to “provoke unto love and good works,” but such language is anything but encouraging. Its effect is seen on the individual who uses it. It soon becomes habitual, for each time it is uttered the discouragement increases. It grows by repetition, but it is withering to the soul.

It is the language of unbelief. Although the individual may be unconscious of the fact, the spirit which prompts it is the same as that possessed by the ten spies who brought back an evil report. God had said: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Having this promise, it was exceedingly wicked for them to say they could not possess the land. On this occasion, as well as at other times of murmuring, God showed his great displeasure. In this instance we see the natural result of such distrust. They did not enter the promised land. “And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son

of Nun.” Num. 14:26-30. They said they could not go, and they did not; but Caleb and Joshua, who said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are able to overcome it,” did enter the promised land.

Distrust and faint-heartedness are as displeasing to God now as then. His promises are abundant. Listen to a few: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Heb. 4:15, 16. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Jas. 1:5. God does not upbraid us, *does not* taunt us with our weakness. A child has not the strength of a man, and no father will ridicule his infant child because of its weakness. Its very helplessness appeals to his sympathy. So God says, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Ps. 103:13, 14. But it is necessary to “ask in faith, nothing wavering” for “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Again we are exhorted: “Be content with such things as ye have for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Heb. 13:5; and yet again: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Rom. 8:32. One more passage ought forever to stop all our murmurings and doubtings: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” 1 Cor. 10:13. Read also Heb. 2:18; 12:1-4; 13:8; Phil. 4:4, 13; and especially Ps. 130:17, 18, and Lam. 3:22-33.

Do we really believe these promises? If we did would we not appropriate them to ourselves? We read them, and say we believe them, and yet to very many they seem vague and unreal. But if they are to be of any benefit to us we must consider them as real, and make our requests accordingly. Our belief is measured by our actions, not by our words. Is it not as much infidelity to disbelieve a promise that God has given as it is to disbelieve any other portion of his word? Let us take heed lest there be found in any of us “an evil heart of unbelief in departing from God.”

But ought we not to be sensible of our weakness? Certainly; the more so the better. But we are not to think of it in such a way as to become discouraged. There are two ways of looking at our own frailties. One is to brood over them, lose sight of God's willingness to help, and become discouraged. This pleases Satan. If we are prone to doubt and become faint-hearted, he will assist us to see more lions in the way than really exist. And such a course is really a form of selfishness. The individual becomes so intensely self-conscious that he can take cognizance of nothing else. He thinks of himself so much that he loses sight of Christ. He imagines that he himself must do the great work that is to be done, and when a few attempts show him the impossibility of it, he becomes discouraged. Another way to consider them is in the light of the promises of God. When we do this we have every reason to be encouraged, and God is pleased with us. The more we distrust ourselves while trusting God, the stronger we will be, for God has said: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:9. And in view of this, Paul was led to say: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for *when I am weak then am I strong.*" No man ever had more trials than Paul had, or felt less confidence in himself; but he believed God's promises, and it was no vain boast for him to say: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Thus it was with Caleb and Joshua. It was not vain self-confidence which led them to say, "We are well able to overcome it." Hear them: "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is departed from them, and *the Lord is with us*: fear them not." Num. 14:8, 9. So the Lord is with us; his promises are multiplied to us. We have the accumulated proofs of his power and goodness through thousands of years past. It is far more sinful for us to distrust God now, than it was for ancient Israel. Then, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised."

"BEHOLD My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench; He shall bring forth judgment

unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth.” Isa. 43:1-4. This is the work of Christ. What a world of comfort and encouragement there is in the statement of it, especially in the last verse. His work is to set judgment, or righteousness, in the earth. Righteousness can be set in the earth only by putting it into the hearts of men.

Christ’s work is to take poor, weak, sinful men, and make righteous beings of them; to clothe them with the righteousness of God. Very poor material He has to work with, and no one knows this better than He. But He shall not fail or be discouraged in this work. He knows how difficult the task is; but knowing man’s sinfulness and hardness of heart, He is not discouraged. Then what occasion is there for being discouraged? If He is not discouraged with His task, need we be? Shall not we gather courage from His courage? We may be of good courage, for He has overcome the world, and in Him we shall do valiantly.

HAVE you ever thought that the Lord helps people only when they are in some dreadful calamity or affliction? Very many think that the common everyday sort of trials that come must be borne without any special help from God; for can we not worry through them ourselves in one way or another?

It is expected that in a trial so deep that it is not in human flesh to endure it, the Lord will put His strength upon the sufferer. But there are many Christians who struggle on under little discouragements and burdens and perplexities that they know they can endure, without rolling the little things upon the Lord and finding joy in them.

The Lord is so great that He can regard little things. You remember that when the sons of the prophets in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 6) went out to cut down trees for their house, one of them lost his axe. It fell into the river. An axe is not such a valuable possession, though doubtless more costly in those days than now; but to a poor man with only a little, that little is his all. In this case, too, the axe was not his own, and he cried, “Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” The Lord relieved the poor man’s anxiety by causing the iron to float upon the water, and the man put out his hand and took it up.

Is there not encouragement in this story to go to the Lord with the little things, and let Him help to bear them? To a rich man a matter of a few shillings may not be worth a thought. But to one who is struggling to earn his daily bread by honest toil, these little things become great. Believe that the Lord is so interested in His children’s



welfare that He longs to help in the small perplexities, and you have the secret of a happy life.

The Lord is a great deal nearer to men than many think. In Him they “live and move,” as Paul says. Every motion that we make in going about our work is actually by the strength which the Lord gives. He sustains us physically for our duties, and He is so near that He knows the slightest burden that rests upon the tired worker. He not only knows, but He asks us to cast that burden upon Him. Try it in the common work and little troubles of life, and you will find the rest that He promises.

“FOR a person to live and die happy, he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” These words we lately saw in a religious journal and have very often heard similar expressions. The utterance of such a sentiment gives evidence of a very crude idea of religion and its object. We think that such a view of religion is injurious, for the following reasons:—

1. It fosters selfishness, which is directly opposed to true religion. To make happiness the sole or the principle incentive for gaining religion, is to direct the attention of the individual to himself rather than to God. Love should be the mainspring of every act of the Christian. The reward of the righteous, and the punishment of the ungodly are both set before us, to stimulate us both by hope and by fear; yet these are not the main incentives. “Perfect love casteth out fear.” It is certain that when one is imbued with the spirit of Christ, who said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work,” he will not do his work through fear of the consequences if he should neglect it. At the birth of Christ the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Luke 2:14. And the first commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” while the second is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” In true religion there is no place for thoughts of self; the glory of God, and the welfare of our fellow-men comprise our whole duty. All the thought the Christian has to take of self is to keep himself unspotted from the world.

2. The idea is injurious because it tends to discouragement of those who hold it. If a man thinks that happiness is the sure and invariable result of belief in Christ, he will surely be discouraged when trouble comes, as it certainly will. When the Thessalonians were in distress, Paul wrote to them “that no man should be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed there unto.” 1

Thess. 3:3. It is enough for the disciple if he as his Lord, and he was “a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief.” So he says to his followers: “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” “Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” True, the Christian will be “joyful in tribulation,” yet it will be tribulation still.

3. The idea that happiness is a constant accompaniment of believe in Christ, is injurious, because it tends to produce false hopes. The careless sinner and the professor who is “at ease in Zion,” having this idea, fancy that they are in a good ease. They have no trouble, therefore they think the Lord must be pleased with them. They forget that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Pious Job was afflicted almost beyond conception, while the wicked in whom David saw were not in trouble as other men, neither were they plagued like other men. They were in prosperity, and had more than heart could wish. And this was just because they were wicked. The devil can well afford to let his servants dwell in peace, but “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

A happy death is not in itself any evidence of a person’s piety, nor an assurance that he is sure of final happiness. The psalmist says of the wicked, “There are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.” Ps. 73:4. On the other hand, a good man may, like Hezekiah, be in sore distress at the thought that he is near death.

In a word, the honor and glory of God should be placed before our own happiness. Indeed, happiness should never be sought. If we seek for happiness, it will be sure to escape us, although we may be satisfied with a spurious article. If we glorify God, that is of itself true happiness or blessedness, for Christ declares that they that mourn *are* happy. And this should show the folly of trusting to *feeling* in any case. The basis of the Christian’s hope and trust is not feeling, but knowledge. In the midst of terrible trial he can say, “I *know* that my redeemer liveth;” and although he may feel that because of poverty and low station, he is despised by men, if he keeps “the commandments of God and faith of Jesus,” he may have, not the *feeling*, but the *assurance* that he pleases God.

So hereafter can we not all say with the poet:—

“Let good or ill befall,  
It must be good for me,  
Secure of having Thee in all,

Of having all in Thee.”