

TAKE COURAGE

Scripture Reading: Read Acts chapter 23

Do you know what the most common command of Scripture is? Is it “Believe”? “Give?” “Praise?” No, it’s none of these. It must be love, then, right? Nope. It’s “Fear not” or some variation like it (e.g. “Don’t be afraid”). Again and again in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, we are commanded not to fear. Often, the command is linked to some characteristic of God to show us why we shouldn’t fear: *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10)*. Yet, “fear not” is only half of the equation found in Scripture. To “fear not” keeps something negative from entering your heart but it leaves a hole, a vacuum if you will, that still needs to be filled with something positive. That positive is “courage!”

That the Lord desires both the removal of fear and the addition of courage in his people is illustrated by Moses’ speech to the Israelites just before they cross over the Jordan to face their enemies: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”* The same pattern is illustrated in the life of Joshua when Moses challenged him: *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* In the New Testament, Jesus, too, follows the same pattern with his disciples when they were frightened by his walking on the water: *“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”* Notice, in all three cases, the command to not be afraid is connected to the command to be courageous and both are grounded in the fact that the Lord is present with his people.

In Acts 23, we find the apostle Paul being challenged by the Lord to be courageous. Following the attack and beating by the mob, his arrest by the Romans and the interrogation by the religious leaders, Paul was probably a tad overwhelmed, to say the least. It would have been normal to be tempted to fear but the Lord encouraged him: *“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”* The Lord wanted his servant to remain steadfast and to finish the work God had given him to do. What’s true of Paul is to be true of us. God wants us free from ungodly fear and living courageous lives in faith. Unfortunately, too many believers are like the cowardly lion in the movie, “The Wizard of Oz.” They wring their hands in fear of the future and are unsure of what lies ahead. But, for those who profess faith in a Sovereign God who works all things together for the good of those who love Him, there is no need for fear; no reason to invite this unwanted guest home. Instead of being afraid, we can be strong and courageous.

Action Step: Using a concordance, check out the Bible verses that contain the words “courage” or “courageous” in them. Read through these verses and take to heart God’s command to you to not only “fear not” but also to “be strong and courageous!”

Prayer focus: Pray that the Lord would develop a courageous heart within you to step out in faith and to do His will this week.

Take-a-way: *“Fear not” is half the equation. The other half is “take courage.”*