

Heroes and Cowards

by R.A. Torrey

The sermon emphasizes the importance of confessing Christ publicly, despite the fear of man, in order to obtain the fullness of blessing and be a true Christian.

Scripture: Proverbs 29:25, John 12:42

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "The Fear of Man"

Description

R.A. Torrey's sermon 'Heroes and Cowards' emphasizes the dangers of the fear of man, illustrating how it leads individuals to compromise their values and ultimately face ruin. He shares poignant examples of young men and women who succumbed to peer pressure, resulting in destructive choices that cost them their integrity and lives. Torrey contrasts this with the courage of true believers, like the Apostle Paul, who boldly confess their faith despite societal pressures. He urges listeners to publicly declare their faith in Christ, highlighting that true courage is required to stand for Jesus in a compromising world. The sermon calls for a commitment to be heroes of faith rather than cowards who hide their beliefs.

Transcript

"The fear of man bringeth a snare." -- Proverbs xxix. 25.

I have a long text to-night, in fact three texts. The text is the best part of the sermon. If a sermon is better than the text it is a poor sermon. A good sermon is simply an exposition of the text. You will find the first text in Proverbs xxix. 25: "The fear of man bringeth a snare." Whatever your views about the inspiration of the Bible may be, you know that this verse is true enough, anyhow. How many times we have seen that statement of God's Word fulfilled. How many a man and woman in London to-night has been snared by the fear of man, and ruined for time and eternity. For example, how many a young man has come up to London, a pure, innocent, upright, temperate young fellow, and intended to lead a sober, honest, industrious life in this great city. He knew something about the perils of drink, and was wise enough not to touch it; and he comes to London intending to be what every man and woman ought to be, a total abstainer. One night this young man goes out to dinner, and the gentleman at the head of the table urges him to take a glass of wine. But this young man refuses; he says, "I never drink." The gentleman laughs at him, the other people at the table chaff him, some say that he is insulting the host or hostess by not drinking to their health, and the fear of man brings him into the snare. He takes his first glass of wine, and that leads on to another and another and another, and to-night he is a drunkard on the streets of London, because of the fear of man, reputation gone, manhood gone, brain power gone, business capacity gone,

everything gone; the fear of man has proved his temporal and eternal ruin. How many a young fellow comes up to this great city of London, an honest young man, who has never gambled in his life. He plays an occasional friendly game of cards; but one night, after work, he is out in the company of a few friends and they are playing cards as usual, and some one of the group suggests that they should put up a little stake, only a small amount, just to make the game interesting. The young man hesitates, but they say, "You don't need to gamble, it is only threepence or sixpence either way; we are not going to play for high stakes." He says, "I never gamble; I believe it is dishonest." But they laugh at him, and chaff him, and tell him he should go along to Sunday School; and he cannot stand their chaff, and he puts up his first threepenny bit on a game of cards. The passion of the gambler, which is a more consuming passion than that of strong drink and more ruinous, takes possession of him; he robs his employer, and to-day he is in prison, because the fear of man led him to gamble, and ruined him utterly.

How many a young girl has come up here from the country, a modest, innocent girl, but without firm Christian principles. She lives in very poor lodgings; and seeking for a little gaiety and a little brightness in her humdrum life, she goes occasionally to the theatre, goes to dances and gatherings. She becomes quite infatuated with the dance, and one night, a very pleasant and attractive young fellow with whom she has become acquainted at the dance, makes a subtle suggestion to her that she does not exactly understand, but at which her modesty revolts, and she repels it with indignation. But he laughs at her. "Why," he says, "you don't understand. I don't mean any harm at all; it is quite a common thing." And that girl has learnt to permit familiarity which no modest girl would allow herself to permit-for the ballroom admits of familiarity which is permitted by decent people nowhere outside of the ballroom. It is the first step to a blasted life, and that girl to-night is an outcast on the streets of London. The fear of man has brought a snare which has ruined her.

My next text is in John xii. 42 and 43: "Nevertheless among, the chief rulers also many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Now that was written about Jerusalem in Christ's time, but it sounds just as if it were written about London to-day. How many men there are in London, leading men, just like these chief rulers of Jerusalem, who believe in Jesus Christ in their hearts, but they do not confess Him with their mouths for fear of what men will say of them, for they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. It is moral cowardice. There are hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women just as fully convinced as I am that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and yet holding back from open, public confession of Christ because of moral cowardice.

Now turn to the third text, in 2 Corinthians xii. 10. It is a very different picture. In the two texts thus far we have a picture of the moral coward; now we get to the glorious picture of the moral hero: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake!" Ah, there is a picture worth looking at! A man who was reproached for the name of God, persecuted for his loyalty to the truth, but although they heaped all manner of infamy on him, he looked up with a smiling face and said, "I take pleasure in infamy." Paul went down to Lystra, and because of his loyalty to the truth and his outspoken defense of the truth, they stoned him, after they had almost worshipped him; and they dragged him outside the city. His disciples stood round thinking he was dead. But after a while he rose up again, and went back to Lystra. Then he went to Derbe. Some of the cautious Christian brethren at Derbe, remembering what had occurred at Lystra, doubtless said: "Now, Paul, it is all right to be loyal and to believe on Jesus Christ, but you must be little more politic. It is no use running so directly against people's prejudices. Now, Paul, don't you be quite so outspoken here, or they will treat you in Derbe just the same

as they treated you in Lystra. Now, Paul, be a little more politic and compromise a little bit." And that magnificent man looked up and said, "I take pleasure in infirmities and distresses for Christ's sake." Men and women, what you need in London more than anything else is a few men like Paul, and a few women with the same spirit, men and women who will stand for Christ and stand for God's kingdom without compromise, no matter whom it hurts or what people say. Now my subject to-night., derived from these three texts, is "Heroes and Cowards."

I wish to say right here at the beginning that it takes courage to be a Christian, to be a real, true, outspoken follower of Jesus Christ. You and I live in a God-hating world; we live in a compromising age -an age in which men professing to be Christians are trying to please the world and carry on the Church of Christ so that there will be no difference between the church and the world. Now in a God-hating world like this, and in a compromising age like this, it takes courage to be an out-and-out soldier of Jesus Christ. It takes more courage than a great many of you have got. Many a man to-day who has great courage, who has courage enough to be a soldier, who has courage enough to go to war, courage enough to go to the front, courage enough to stand on the firing line, and stand in the face of a galling fire from the enemy's guns, has not courage enough to go back to the barracks at night and kneel down and say his prayers, and endure the chaff of his fellow-soldiers. It takes Courage, the sublimest courage to be an out-and-out Christian.

But I will give you to-night five reasons why every man and woman should publicly confess Christ before the world.

1. In the first place, because He is such a glorious Lord and Master. There is nothing to be ashamed of in Jesus Christ. A young fellow got up in a meeting (he had been recently converted), and he tried to give a little testimony for Jesus Christ. But he was inexperienced in public testimony and could not talk very well; and, after he had sat down, an old gentleman got up and said, "Young man, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You cannot preach, and you ought not to try; you ought to be ashamed of yourself." Then the young man rose again and said: "Well, I am ashamed of myself, but I am not ashamed of my Lord." Ah, the trouble with some of you gentlemen is that you are not ashamed of yourselves, though you ought to be, but you are ashamed of the Lord Jesus. I never met an Englishman who was ashamed of Queen Victoria. I would have been ashamed of him if I had met one, she was such a glorious Queen. I have never met an Englishman who was ashamed of King Edward. But glorious a Queen as Queen Victoria was (and though I am an American citizen I believe she was the most glorious Queen that ever reigned on earth), and glorious a King as we expect King Edward to become, the glory of Queen Victoria and the glory of King Edward pales into utter insignificance before the glory of Jesus Christ. Oh, men and women, there is nothing to be ashamed of in Jesus Christ. It is the noblest thing a man can say, "I am a follower of the perfect Man; I am a follower of the Son of God; I am a follower of the One infinitely glorious, Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

2. In the second place, every man and woman should confess the Lord Jesus publicly before the world for the sake of their influence. Every man has an influence. There is no man in London that has not an influence. Every one here has an influence, either for Jesus Christ or against Jesus Christ. There is no man or woman or child here to-night who, if they confessed Jesus before the world as their Lord, and lived in accordance with that confession, would not have an influence to bring somebody else to Christ. On the other hand, there is no man, woman, or child here to-night, who if he does not confess Christ, no matter how well he lives, has not an influence against Christ; and the better he lives the more his influence is against Christ, for people look at him and say, "Look at that man; as far as I can see he lives just as well

as these professed Christians, and he is not a Christian, does not profess faith in Christ, I don't see the need of becoming a Christian." Oh, every one of you men that are not openly, decidedly, constantly confessing Christ before the world, you have an influence against Jesus Christ.

At one time, when Horace Bushnell was a tutor in Yale College, they had a great revival throughout the college. Horace Bushnell was the most popular tutor in Yale, but he was not a Christian. And the fact that he was not a Christian was a stumbling-block in the way of many of the students. Horace Bushnell knew it, and was greatly disturbed by it. He went home one night in great uneasiness. Something said to him, "You stand right in the way of this work; if you were a Christian there are dozens of the young men of Yale College that would come to Christ." "But," said he to himself, "how can I come to Christ? I don't believe in the Bible, and I don't believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I cannot play the hypocrite, just so as not to stand in the way of others." He was very uneasy, and walked up and down his room thinking about it. Finally, a voice said to him in his heart, "Horace Bushnell, what do you believe anyhow?" "Well, one thing I believe is that there is an absolute difference between right and wrong." "Well, have you taken your stand on that which you do believe? You talk about what you do not believe, think about what you do believe. Have you ever taken your stand on right, to follow it wherever it carries you, even if it carries you over the Niagara Falls?" He said, "No, I never have, but I will." And he prayed, "O God, if there is any God, show me if Jesus Christ is Thy Son, and if you will show me that I will promise to accept Him as my Saviour and confess Him before the world," and in a short time the light burst in upon Horace Bushnell's darkened soul, and he came out on the side of Christ, and almost every young man in Yale College was converted.

Oh, friends, if you say you are agnostics, if you say you are skeptics, have you ever made an honest attempt to get out of your agnosticism? If you have not your agnosticism is no excuse, none whatever. Ah, if some of you men and women of London occupying prominent places and positions, if you took your stand where you ought to take it to-night, on the side of truth, scores of others would come to Christ.

When Mr. Charles G. Finney was preaching at Rochester, New York, in the thirties, a great many lawyers came to hear him, and one night, away up in the gallery, sat the Chief-Justice of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York. As he sat there listening to Mr. Finney's tremendous logic, the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals of New York State became satisfied of the truth of what Mr. Finney preached. Then the question came to him, "Will you come forward like the other ordinary men and women to the 'anxious seat?'" Something in him said, "It will never, do in the world. You occupy the most exalted legal position in New York State; you are the Chief-Justice of the Court of Appeals; it would never do in the world for you to walk down in front, and seek salvation kneeling down at the 'anxious seat.'" He sat there thinking for a while; then he said to himself, "Why not? I am convinced of the truth of that man's position. I know my duty; why should I not do it like any other man?" He got up from his place in the gallery, and went down the stairway, and came up the stairs back of where Mr. Finney was preaching, and Mr. Finney, in the midst of his sermon felt some one pulling on the skirts of his coat. He turned round, and there stood the Chief-Justice of the Court of Appeals of New York State. He asked, "What is it?" The Chief-Justice replied, "Mr. Finney, if you will call for people to come to the 'anxious seat,' I will come." Mr. Finney stopped his sermon and said, "The Chief-Justice of the Court of Appeals of New York State says if I will call for anxious ones to come to the 'anxious seat,' he will come. I call for anxious ones now"; and the Chief-Justice of the Court of Appeals went down and took his seat on the "anxious seat," and almost every lawyer and barrister in Rochester was converted, and it is said 100,000 people were converted in twelve months in that district.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are some of you here to-night who, if you had the courage of your convictions and came to Christ, not secretly as some of you want to, but walked right out and took your seat down here in front when I called you to do it, it would shake London. Are you men enough to do it? Are you women enough to do it? Your influence may not be as great as that, but all of you have an influence. Will you exert it for Jesus Christ when the time comes to-night?

3. In the third place, every one should publicly confess Christ before the world, because it is the only way to obtain the fulness of blessing that there is in Jesus Christ. In Matthew x. 32, 33, are the words of the Master himself: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in Heaven." Oh, friends, think of it-to have Jesus Christ confessing you before Jesus Christ the Father in Heaven. A little fellow, a wee little fellow, got up at a meeting one night, with the tears running down his cheeks -he was a little white-haired Swedish boy- and said, "Friends, if I confess Jesus on earth down here, then will He also confess me up there before the Father" and sat down. That was the best speech that was made that night. Oh, to think of it- to have the Lord Jesus confess your name before the Father in Heaven! In our great Civil War, when one of our generals won a great victory, it was the custom of the Member of Congress for his district to propose a vote of thanks to him on the floor of the American Congress. It was the highest ambition of generals to be thus mentioned upon the floor of Congress. I remember that grand old hero, General Howard, once saying to me, "Torrey, there was one proud day of my life, and that was when a vote of thanks was moved to me on the floor of Congress by the whole Congress for my stand at Gettysburg." But what is it to be mentioned on the floor of any Parliament or Congress down here to being mentioned in the court of Heaven by the Lord Jesus Himself? And the men and women who confess Christ down here in Mildmay Hall, Jesus Christ will confess you before God in Heaven.

Moreover, when Christ does confess you before the Father then you will get the fulness of the blessing. When He confesses you then God sends His Holy Spirit into your heart. I remember one night in a mission at Atlanta, Georgia, at the close of the meeting, a young man of about thirty to thirty-five years of age, was brought to me. Some one said to me, "This is one of the leading advocates of Atlanta. He took all the oratorical honours in his university. I wish you would lead him to Christ." I stood a few moments talking to him, then I said to him, "Are you not a Christian?" He said, "No, sir. I am a church member; in fact, I am the superintendent of a Sunday School, but I am not a Christian." "Well," I said, "why don't you become a Christian?" He said, "I have no feeling." I said, "It is not a question of feeling. Do you believe you are a sinner?" He said, "I know I am." I said, "Do you believe Jesus Christ died for you?" He said, "I know He did." I said, "Then will you take Him for your own Saviour to-night?" He said, "Can I do it without feeling?" I said, "Certainly; it is not a question of feeling, but of common sense. Will you take Him?" He said, "I will; if I can I will." I said, "Let us pray together." We knelt and prayed, and when we got up, he said, "I don't feel any different." I said, "I didn't think you would." "But," he said, "a lot of these people say they have such joy." I said, "You have not gone far enough; you have to confess your Lord publicly before the joy comes." Almost everybody had gone out of the big Tabernacle; but he said to the few who were remaining, "Friends, I have decided to-night to be a Christian; I have taken the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Saviour." and with a few more words he said, "Good-night" and went out. Next morning a leading merchant of the town came to me and said, "You ought to have seen what I saw last night when I left this building. I had gone only a short way down the street when I saw _____ leaning up against a lamp-post. I knew he did not drink; I knew he was not intoxicated. I went up to him and asked him what was the matter and why he was shouting. He said, 'I am so happy, I can hardly stand up.'" I saw him that day, and I told him what my

friend had told me. I said, "Mr. _____ said he saw you leaning against a lamp-post and shouting, and when he asked you what was the matter, you said you were so happy you could not stand up. Is that so?" He said, "It was literally true. Ten minutes after I left you last night, such a joy came over my soul that literally I had to lean against the lamp-post and shout for joy."

I don't know if it will affect you just that way; it never did me; but I will guarantee one thing -that it you will accept Jesus Christ with all your heart and surrender your whole life to Him, and His control, and publicly confess Him before the world, God will send His Holy Spirit into your heart, filling it with a joy that you never knew before.

4. In the fourth place, every man and woman should confess Christ, because it is the only way to be saved. In Romans x. 9 and 10 we read: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." People say to me in some places where we go, "I don't believe in this standing up and confessing;" but I don't care what you believe; the question is, "What does God say?" And God says, "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." There are a great many people who will tell you if a man or woman believe in Christ in the secrecy of their own hearts they need never say anything about it, for God sees the heart. He does see your heart, and if you do not confess Christ, He sees you have not got any real faith. You say, "Is not a man saved by faith?" Yet, but by real faith, and real faith always leads to mouth confession. We read in the very next verse of this chapter, Romans x. 11: "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." If you are ashamed to confess Him you do not believe on Him. A faith that does not lead to confession will never lead to Heaven. There will be no sneaks and cowards in Heaven. Jesus Christ says in Mark viii. 38: "Whoso shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

5. Once more, every man and woman should confess Christ for common decency's sake and self-respect's sake. When you and I stop to think what Christ has done for us; how He left Heaven. with all its glory and came down to earth with all its shame; how He was scourged and owned with thorns; how He bore shame and reproach; how He was spat upon and buffeted and nailed to the Cross for you and me; how, although He was rich, yet for our Flakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich; how, though being in the form of God, He thought it not a thing to be grasped to be equal to God, but humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross; how He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities -if men and women, knowing that you will not confess Jesus Christ because of the fear of man, or fear of loss in business, or fear of loss of caste in society, then you are a coward, a poltroon, an ingrate of the basest and blackest kind. You cannot get around it; you know it is God's truth. I cannot see how any intelligent man or woman can bear in mind what Jesus has done for them, and then not confess Him, and still retain their self-respect.

We have some things we are proud of in America, and some things we are ashamed of. One of the things we are proud of in America is this, that all boys and girls in America can get a university education; that the son of the farmer and the day labourer and the washerwoman can get a university education as well as the child of the millionaire. Any boy or girl that is worth educating can go through all degrees of learning in America. Since I have been in Chicago, the grandson of a man who used to work for us at home as our gardener, when I was a boy, has been the mayor of the city of Chicago; and the son of a woman who used to do the cooking in our kitchen has occupied another high position in the city. I rejoice in it; it is one of the

things that make me glad to be an American. In North Carolina, one of the poorer states -poor financially, but rich in men- there was a farmer who had a bright boy. He had a poor farm, but he said, "MY boy is going to get just as good an opportunity as a millionaire's son;" and that poor farmer worked and scraped until he was able to send that boy to the State university. The boy did well, and his letters home delighted his father's and mother's hearts, and they felt well paid for all their sacrifice. But after awhile the father's heart grew lonely, and he said to his wife, "Mother, I cannot stand it any longer; I just must see the boy." It was a long way from the farm to the university, and he loaded his wagon and started on his long drive, and as he drew near to the town he said to himself: "Well, won't the boy be surprised! He don't know I'm coming. Won't he be delighted to see his old father?" He whipped up the old team and hurried on, and entered the town. He was driving up the hill to the college, and as he went, whom should he see coming down but his boy with some gay college companions. The old man was driving slowly, for it was up hill, but when he saw the boy he jumped out and rushed up to him and said, "Oh, my boy, my son!" The son was ashamed of his poor old father, and he straightened himself up and said, "There must be some mistake, sir; you are not my father. I don't know you." I am told -I don't know it to be positively true- but I am told that father turned round with a broken heart and went home to die. I can well believe it. It would break any heart for my boy to treat me that way.

Men and women, what do you say to a boy like that? I say he ought to be horsewhipped. I say he was an infamous ingrate. But I want to say that he was not so infamously ungrateful as you men and women in this hall to-night, who know that Jesus Christ poured out His life unto death on the Cross of Calvary, and who are so mean and contemptible and cowardly that you wont stand up and confess Him.

I am not going to stop with that story. It is too dark. I am going to tell you another story -and thank God it is true- of our home land. A poor woman in one of our towns, who had to work for her living, for she was a widow -she took in washing, I think- had a boy, and he was a bright boy and proved a bright man. I think some of you have heard him. She sent her boy to school. He went through the schools, did well, came out at the very top of his class, and was valedictorian of his class, the highest position, and took a gold medal for special excellence in study. The day he was to graduate he said to his mother: "You know, I graduate to-day, mother." She said, "Yes, I know." "Well, get ready," he said, "it is time to get off to the church"- where the graduating exercises were to be held. "Oh, my boy, I cannot go up there," she said; "I haven't anything fit to wear. Why, all the finest people in the town will be there. You would be ashamed of me if I went." "Ashamed of you, mother?" he said; "never! I owe all I have in the world to you. What is more, mother, I cannot graduate unless you do go; and I won't!" And he helped his mother to get ready, and pinned the old faded shawl round her, and made it look as good as possible, and put on her plain old bonnet, and took her on his arm, and walked down the main street with the plain old mother on his arm to the church. When they got there he took her up the centre aisle, and sat her among the finest people in town. When the time came, he went up to deliver his valedictory address and to receive the gold medal amid the applause of his companions; and when he had received it he walked straight down to where his mother sat, and pinned it on her old faded shawl, and said, "Mother, that belongs to you; you earned it."

That is a boy worth having. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to ask a question: Do you mean to-night to be like that rascally, scoundrelly ingrate, that was ashamed of his old father and broke his heart, and be ashamed of that glorious Christ that died for you; or will you be like the other boy, and, knowing that you owe everything to Jesus Christ, stand up and confess Him to-night, and pin all your honours where they belong, on Jesus Christ!

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