

Three individuals jumped off the platform in Boston this week after seeing a man lying on the subway tracks. Without consideration for their own safety they went to the man's aid, got him up off the tracks, and back onto the platform. They acted courageously. Turns out they were never in any danger themselves because another person had alerted officials and all trains into the station were stopped. But they didn't know that.

During this Breaking the Huddle series we're seeing how important it is for us to be in church studying God's Word so we get God's game plan and go on the offensive against Satan and gain some spiritual victories. But like those individuals in Boston who didn't know what was going to happen and every football team that breaks the huddle who don't know what's going to happen, so also with us. We break our huddle not knowing what's going to happen. It takes courageous faith, something we don't have on our own.

How hard is it to have courageous faith? Take Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples. In the gospel he was riding a spiritual high after receiving praise from Jesus only to go to a spiritual low right after. Jesus shares with us the highs and lows and what it takes to...

Break the Huddle: with a courageous faith
Understanding why Jesus had to go to the cross
Following Jesus even as we carry our cross

Cops mostly eat donuts. Secretaries only answer phones. Those are stereotypes. Your job probably has them too. Since early in the Old Testament people looked forward to the Messiah. God promised he'd show up. But after waiting hundreds of years people ended up with only stereotypes. By the time Jesus showed up no one identified him as the Messiah. They categorized him as just another teacher, a moving speaker who could hold attention and who occasionally did a miracle. Some saw a leader, but not political, not a king, never a Messiah. **"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."** The people all were convinced Jesus was one of these ancient favorites come back to life ushering in the time for the real Messiah to come.

Jesus cared about what the crowds thought. But he cared more at that moment what his disciples thought. The question was personal. **"But what about you? Who do you say I am?"** Someone who was going to follow Jesus needed a clear answer to that question. Peter courageously spoke up for them all. **"You are the Christ."** In Peter's mind and in the mind of all the disciples Jesus was the Messiah. But their understanding of what the Messiah would do was off the mark.

The stereotype was a Messiah who demanded respect and approval. Jesus unpacked the stunning truth for disciples who didn't want to hear it. **"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...be rejected...and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."** This news was confrontational. Peter just courageously spoke the truth about Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah. But his misunderstandings about that were being brought into the light. The stark reality of God's love, of Jesus on earth, and the inseparable and looming cross as the price of salvation was hitting them right between the eyes. Suddenly their courage was gone because they didn't understand Jesus had to go to the cross.

The pope recently made remarks about how he can't judge homosexuals. He also seemed to lighten up on the strong stance the Roman Catholic Church historically has taken on abortions, gay marriage, and other hot button issues. People instantly saw a courageous pope. "He's seeing the light. He's recognizing what it takes to be a church in the 21st century." It sounded like he softened what the Bible says and gained rave reviews. Do you think that's what needs to be done for us to be popular? If we could just revise our language, our stance, our Savior we might gain more acceptance in our community. How much easier would it be if we didn't have a Savior who died such a gruesome death or suffered? Then we wouldn't have to talk to people about bad news who just want good news. Maybe we could revise the history about Jesus to just include the moments he seemed most compassionate. Hit the highlights of healing diseases and caring for the wounded. Even in our own lives we'd like Jesus more if he came when we really needed him. We'd even tell him exactly what we need. He could give us the money, grant the healing, or pass along the blessing and recess into the background again. But none of those are courageous faith, they're sinful.

Courageous faith comes from the truth. Peter was right. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Savior of the world. He is the Redeemer who was sent by God with the special mission of saving all of us from our sins. Jesus was always questioned by religious leaders who thought they were being courageous for God. Jesus was targeted as someone stirring up trouble. People were against him. He was in danger and being persecuted. Jesus suffered most every day of his life. But it wasn't without purpose. His suffering was for you and me. **"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected..."** It had to happen that way. He would suffer and die for your sins and mine. He would be the substitute before God. He would redeem sinners who didn't deserve it. Courageous faith understands the truth that Jesus had to go to the cross.

If you've ever waited in line for a roller coaster you know the feeling. With either joy or fear you watch the people go out, scream, and come back looking joyful or petrified. That's when you realize you're next. Jesus was getting his disciples to the same point. He was telling them what he was going to have to do, endure really. There would be suffering at the hands of religious leaders, crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, death, then resurrection. Then he made them realize, they were next. You must realize it too, you're next. Whoever follows Jesus does it while carrying a cross.

The followers of Jesus needed a major clarification. Following Jesus wasn't the ticket to easy street. Following Jesus meant dedication to giving up and denying oneself. No one was forced, only volunteers walked behind Jesus on the dusty trails. But each would carry a cross like their master. **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** Each was a product of God's grace. They followed because God loved them and moved them to follow the Savior. But the burden of the cross was real. The harder they struggled to try for the good life here the easier it would be to lose their eternal life in heaven.

If we're honest we want all the glory and none of the difficulty. We think we've got a courageous faith already. We believe in Jesus. We talk about him. But carrying the cross, isn't there another way? A cross means suffering. A cross means death. We'd rather take the short sighted viewpoint on life trying to gobble up as much pleasure and enjoyment today making every moment count. We assume there will still be time to follow Jesus later. Jesus warned, **"whoever wants to save his life will lose it..."** Our sinfulness sells out for pleasure today with the potential of missing heaven's glory forever.

Jesus knew the temptation to pleasure and joy. His own disciple tempted him to take the easy way out. **"Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But he rebuked Peter. Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Jesus knew the way of God; it was the way of the cross. He had to take it. Jesus went through the suffering to glory. His cross removed the unbearable burden of sin for us. Christ went to his cross and made our crosses bearable by strengthening us under them. Jesus was willing to bear his cross, the ultimate in self denial, in order to win for us the victory over death and the cross.

Carrying our cross in life isn't easy but courageous faith recognizes it's necessary. Jesus Christ gives us that courageous faith. Courageous faith gets the cancer diagnosis, hears about the miscarriage, loses the job, and still finds its comfort in God's Word. Courageous faith works through difficulties in marriage instead of running away. Courageous faith resists temptation to pornography online. Courageous faith gives generously confident in God's promise to provide. Courageous faith goes out on a limb and invites someone to church because you love what you have here and you want them to know Christ like you do. Courageous faith forgives those who have sinned against you and loves those who don't love you. Courageous faith follows Jesus even as we carry our crosses.

Break the huddle this morning recognizing Jesus' willingness to carry his cross, suffer, and die. But never forget his promise, the one you may have passed over like his disciples did. **"And after three days rise again."** Jesus didn't stay dead and neither will you. Faith in him guarantees you a resurrection to eternal life in him. Until then you carry the cross he gives you, whatever it might be. Break the huddle with a courageous faith in Christ.