

COURAGE

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*Lessons: Joshua 1; Arcana Coelestia 9214.1-2;
or The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 115.*

You children would all like to be brave. You look up to the great heroes about whom you read in the Word and in your history books, admire them for their courage, and hope that you may grow up to be like them. And you all have some idea of what courage means. It is something that enables someone to conquer fear and go into danger for the sake of someone or something he loves and believes in, no matter how great the risk to his life may be. It is something that enables him to stand fast before an enemy and not run away; something that enables him to stand up for the things he knows to be true, and to bear hardship and pain and suffering in a just cause without ever giving in to his difficulties.

But maybe you do not know that there are two kinds of courage. Perhaps you do not know that there is a kind of courage that is bad as well as one that is good. There is a kind of courage that comes from trusting in oneself, from a love of self alone and a conceit so strong as to make one believe oneself to be so much more clever and powerful than one's enemies that one can always get oneself out of danger. And that kind of courage is bad just because it comes from one's self. But there is another kind of courage that comes from trusting in the Lord, from knowing and believing that if we try to do His will He will protect us. Those who have this courage do not fear anyone; because they know that the Lord will preserve them from all real harm no matter how much evil there may be about them. Their only fear is that they may offend the Lord by breaking one of His commandments, and they are humble before the Lord, but fearless among all people. This is the kind of courage that is good, and that we should seek from the Lord, who alone can give it to us.

What is meant by this kind of courage is shown to us in the Word, in part of the story of Joshua. When Moses died, and Joshua was chosen by the Lord to lead the children of Israel, he had great need of courage, for the work he was given to do was so difficult that to carry it out seemed almost impossible. He had to take the tribes of Israel safely across the Jordan, lead them into battle against the fierce and warlike nations of Canaan, conquer the land he had invaded and divide it among them by lots, and then settle them in their inheritances. And Joshua knew that the tribes he would have to face far outnumbered his own forces, that they were strong and fierce, and skilled and hardened in the art of war, which was their trade. He knew that they would have the advantage of fighting on their own ground in defense of their own homes and families, which always makes men fight harder. And he knew they

would be strengthened by the belief that their gods must be more powerful than his in their own country.

So Joshua had great need of courage. But that courage was not to come from confidence in himself as a military leader or in the ability of his army. He had to plan the campaign and carry it out, using all his skill in so doing. But his courage was to come from belief in the Lord's promise that the work was the Lord's and not his own; from confidence that, as He had said, the Lord would lead and fight for the armies of Israel and give them the victory over their enemies. That was why the Lord said to him: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest," (Joshua 1:9). Joshua was to be brave, not because he trusted in himself, but because the Lord would be with him wherever he went. He was to have no fear of human enemies, but was to fear the Lord by keeping all His commandments faithfully.

Now we know that Joshua had such courage. When the sons of Israel had crossed the Jordan, and were near the city of Jericho, a man with a drawn sword in his hand suddenly appeared before them. Joshua did not know whether this man was a friend or foe, but without hesitating for a moment he went up to him boldly and asked whether he was for them or for their enemies. But when this stranger said, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come," Joshua knew that he was the angel of the Lord and at once fell down before him in humble fear and asked what the Lord commanded him. (Joshua 5:13,14.) As long as Joshua thought that this armed stranger was a man like himself he was not afraid, but he did fear the angel of the Lord and humbled himself before him.

That is the kind of courage we should want to have, being afraid only of not doing the Lord's will. When you children are grown up, you will have to fight against spiritual enemies—against evils and false ideas in your own minds that must be conquered before the Lord can establish His heavenly kingdom there. And the task of conquering them will sometimes seem to you so difficult that to carry it out is almost impossible. But if you learn to believe that the battle is the Lord's, that He will lead and fight for you and give you the victory, if only you do your part and keep His commandments, the Lord will give you true courage. You will never be afraid of evil spirits or wicked men, for you will know that as long as you are trying to do what is right you will be guarded by the Lord from all real harm, from any injury that you might suffer which would keep you from heaven. You will be able to say from the heart, as David did; "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." (Psalm 27:1,3.) The only thing of which you will be afraid is that you may disobey the Lord. And the Lord will give you this courage to fight bravely against all your enemies until the day of victory comes.