



Thawing - Part One
Cowardice
January 8, 2017
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

A few weeks ago, our blessed city went to the ungodly temperature of -3 degrees out.

It was bitter. Absolutely awful.

Our current bedroom is one of the rooms in our house that we have NOT renovated yet, and so it is not insulated and we don't have a very good heating system

set up in that room yet, so it got down to about 45 degrees at night during that week inside the room, which was really really cold....

I woke up that morning, just freezing, and went fill my hario water kettle with water so I could make a cup of coffee and begin to warm myself up, and I turned on the cold water in the kitchen, and nothing came out.

I waited. and waited. and nothing.

I turned on the hot water, and I could tell it was struggling but that water did come on... so it was not hard to diagnose that the cold water line to the kitchen has frozen.

Nothing was coming out.

So I text Ben Allen and asked him for some advice... and he gave me several wise words... obviously, the hope... the goal in that moment, is to figure out how to get the pipe to thaw before the water expands and the pipe bursts.

He asked some questions about the way that we had the pipes insulated, and their location in our crawl space under the house...

He explained that the way you prevent the pipes from freezing, beyond taking the proper steps to insulate and protect them, is you have water running through them. Running water prevents freezing. But obviously, at that point, the water was already frozen inside, we had to warm the pipe up.

The first idea was, get a space heater and just blow hot air on it until it thaws, and then make sure to insulate it properly.

But when we went outside to go down there, we realized that we had, in the summer, taken the little door off of the crawl space to get into it, and we never put anything back in its place. So the absolutely frigid cold air was under there... NOTHING stopped the outside air from coming in, the pipe was as good as OUTSIDE... in -3 degrees...

of course it would freeze. So Jake helped me make a new door and we put this huge piece of insulation on the door, and we closed off the crawl space. Then we got a little heater for Dawn and I's room that was 45 degrees before then, and we heated that back up to about 68...

so now the whole house was a good temperature, the floors weren't as cold because the crawl space was finally closed off, and we were able to sleep without being miserably cold, and we woke up the next morning, and went to turn on the cold water, and it kind of gave this weird sound like it was working hard but was clogged or something, then all the sudden the facet spit out this wonderful brown colored water for about 10 seconds, and then the water cleared up, and it works just fine now.

Nothing had burst! We were so grateful.

But in that particular circumstance, we never even went fully down into the crawl space and blew hot air on the pipe. All we did was adjusted the atmosphere around the pipe. We changed a few small things, and in doing so we fixed a problem that could have been much worse.

and life is like that.

Sometimes there are areas in our lives, that we just need to change, if we are going to be who we are supposed to be. There are certain places in life that you will not be able to go if you aren't willing to make the necessary adjustments to get there.

and please, hear my heart on this, because you know me...

I believe with all of my heart that God can use anyone.

He can use anyone to do anything.

He spoke through a donkey in Numbers 22 (verse 30)

In the Genealogy of Jesus listed in Matthew chapter 1, we find out that God used one of the most screwed up family lines in history to be the ones who usher in the Christ.

In *that* family line include Judah and Tamar, which is one of the most screwed up stories you will find anywhere both about gross sexual sin, manipulation, and the thing that the bible describes as the worst thing in their story... utter injustice, as Judah refused to do his required duty of taking care of Tamar, who was the widow to his sons.

In that Genealogy is Rahab, who we know was a prostitute.

One of the most peculiar lines in Matthew chapter 1 talks about King David, it says that David was the Father of Solomon, by the wife of Uriah. So Matthew even goes out of his way to focus on how screwed up that situation is, by not even naming Bathsheba but instead focusing on the fact that through something sinful... through David sleeping with someone else's wife... continued the family line of Jesus.

Abraham was a liar and a coward. Isaac was a liar and a coward who followed in His Father's footsteps, did not learn from the mistakes of his father, but instead made the same mistakes.

On and on it goes... and on and on God continued to use those people to play a role in the greatest story that will ever be told for all of human history.

God can use anybody. No matter where you find yourself today. God will meet you there... right where you are. And he can use you to do something great, even as you are right now, even when maybe you even think... "I am not as I should be."

I believe that the gospel of grace is the most powerful, life changing gift on the planet. But I also know that as a church, and as people who want to see God move radically in this place... we can't just stay the same after grace gets ahold of us.

Ultimately something has to happen in you, if your life is ever going to move beyond this place where you always feel like God is fixing you and reconciling you and bringing you back all the time... to a place where you can just stand in health and say God, I am not perfect, I never will be... BUT I AM NOT GOING BACK TO WHAT I USED TO BE.

EVER.

God will use anyone who is willing to be used, and He can even use bad situations to lead to things that fulfill his purpose, like he did with King David. He did a series of bad things, that in many ways got progressively worse, and in the end Uriah, Bathsheba's first husband was killed at David's hand, and Bathsheba ended up losing the baby that was birthed out of that affair...

and God still used that relationship to later birth Solomon, who would carry on the family line that Jesus would eventually be born into.

And God continued to use David in amazing ways for his purposes.

but there had to come a time when something changed *in* David, that actually took shape in his heart and took form in the way that he lived his life, so that he could actually be used by God every day... through everything that He did... not just the things that God had to save him from and redeem him for the mistakes that he made.

There had to come a time in David's life when he uttered these words:

“Create in me a CLEAN HEART, oh God, and renew a steadfast Spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

and he was later known as what?

A man after God’s own heart, who did all that he was commanded to do.

Something changed in him.. he was a flawed man who became so in tune with what God wanted him to do, that he did it all.

we have to change if we are going to be the change.

And there are things in our lives that just cause us to stay the same, year after year, time after time.

For some people it is obvious sins that we keep coming back to.

But for others it is subtle sins that we keep coming back to... and sometimes it is things that, in and of themselves aren’t even sinful, and yet we give them such a hold over our lives that they derail what God is trying to do in us and it becomes sinful.

So for this series, we are going to cover some of those areas. Today we are looking at Cowardice. Next week we are looking at “busyness” later in the series we will look at disappointment.

These are not the only things... but these are some of the things that really work against people and really stop people from being who they are supposed to be and doing what they are supposed to do in life.

So let’s start with Cowardice.

Last year the very first sermon of the year that we gave was called “Why are we afraid” and that entire message was a deep and detailed look at the problem of “fear” in our lives, and how it holds us back from everything that we are supposed to be. Fear stands in direct opposition to the will of God in your life, the bible says that it is a Spirit... and the Bible says that it does

not come from God. God has not given us a SPIRIT of FEAR, but of power, love and a sound mind (1 Tim. 1:7)... God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of OVERCOMING!

and we really dug into that last year, so we are going to handle it a little bit differently this year, and if you want to really study fear, you can always go back and watch that on our website or mobile app.

this year I want to actually talk about being a coward. Not only because it derails so much of what God wants to do in your life... but also because it is a sin.

and it is not just some feeble sin that we think we can get away with, even though that is what most people consider it.

Most people think of the verse in James (4:17)... it says "to him who knows what he ought to do and yet he does not do it, it is a sin." But we tend to downplay it... like, "it is a sin," but HOW BAD COULD IT REALLY BE?

It is actually a sin that the writer John describes in the book of Revelation, as something that has the potential to heap upon yourself eternal judgment.

Which sounds extreme, but it is because the cost of not doing what YOU are supposed to do VERY WELL could be SOMEONE ELSE'S ETERNITY!

and that is some scary stuff... so, with that insanely long introduction now over... lets open our bibles this morning, to the book of Revelation, chapter 21, verses 5-8:

And he who was seated on the throne said, "**Behold, I am making all things new.**" Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the **cowardly**, the **faithless**, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

lets pray.

Behold, I am making all things new.

Man... I want to be a part of that.

We think of the New Year, and we suddenly see a lot of fancy pictures that pop up on instagram and Facebook with a sun rising over a big city and that verse plastered on top of it, Revelation 21:5 "Behold, I make all things new."

and so this tends to be *us* at the New Year... suddenly, our wheels start turning in ways that they haven't since it started to get cold out... and we get really really excited about the fact that once again, we get a new year... another chance... an opportunity to do something great...

If we are lucky, like we were this year, the first couple of days it may even be a little warmer... high 40's or even 50's if we are lucky.

But if you are anything like me... you get stoked about new opportunities, you get a new notebook, you write down new ideas and plans and visions for your life, and then suddenly, you go outside, and get hit with a freezing cold wind and you realize its now 5 degrees outside, and you wonder "how is it that three days ago it was 50, and everything inspired me, and life was full of hope... and now its 5 degrees, the sun hasn't shined more than 5% this year so far, and all I want to do is hibernate until after Easter.

So sometimes it takes all of a few days to start to wonder "God, aren't you making all things new? because it feels like you are just making ALL THINGS COLD."

and unless you really work against these things... it can be very easy to grow numb during these types of time... and get this idea in your head... "if I can just make it through winter... I can do something great in the Spring."

but the problem with that, is we live in a place where potentially almost half of the year could, off and on, feel a bit like winter OR A LOT LIKE WINTER...

and if half of our lives are spent waiting for the other half of our lives, then we will miss half of our lives.

But if you really think about this verse in Revelation you realize it is even worse than that. See, everyone loves the part that says "I make all things new" -

but we ignore the rest of it... but think about this... think about your life... think about the screwed up world, that God is destined to bring order to...

We, the church, are ambassadors of our King in this world and IN THIS CITY who are here to prepare the way for *that* to come.

And nothing will stand between you, and you being apart of Jesus making all things new, than a little thing called fear. It could be as simple as "fear of the cold" - another way of saying it would be "fear of leaving your comfort zone."

We all post at the New Year - "He makes ALL THINGS NEW"

but nobody ever posts the part that says "but as for..."

But as for the people WHO *BY THEIR LIVES* **ACTUALLY HINDER** THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS... there are other consequences.

think about it... what is it going to be like, when Jesus RENEWS ALL THINGS, but not everybody that was placed in YOUR PATH will be a part of it, because YOU JUST DIDN'T DO WHAT GOD TOLD YOU TO DO?

The writer of Revelation has some harsh words for people like that. And he lists the characteristics of people who will not be a part of this amazing renewal.

The very first thing that he lists, before listing a slew of sins that all of us would agree are HORRIBLE... is "the cowardly." in fact, just to show you how out of place this seems... if you look at the list closely, you notice that you have: murderers, adulterers, idolaters, and liars which date all the way back to Exodus 20 when God gave Moses the ten commandments...

so half of these are things that have been engrained in everyone essentially from the beginning of time, that it is wrong. You don't commit adultery. You don't take someone else life. You don't make for yourself idols and bear false witness against people.
and that leaves only four more.

But the very first thing that John lists is THE COWARDLY.

It is the Greek word "*deilos*" (die-lass) which means to be "timid" or "fearful"
The word timid by definition is "a lack of COURAGE"

and then the very next thing that John lists is "the faithless" which is the Greek word: "*apistos*" (ah pi-stass) meaning: Without trust in God."

So if you were to take the ten commandments OUT of John's list of people who's portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death... (because those seem obvious)

HALF of the remaining things on the list have to do WITH NOT DOING what you are *supposed* to do because you are afraid of what will happen *to you*.

It is easy to not diagnose fear for what it is... but what it is is FAITHLESSNESS.

It is you saying to God, "God, I hear you... but I don't trust you!"

and this is what makes this so insane. When you read about the faithless, and you study it, it is "without faith IN GOD" - and I shared this with you last year... but you have faith. EVERYBODY HAS FAITH.

And it is my view that NOT having faith in God, takes more faith than anything!

“It takes tremendous faith to believe that something is more powerful than God.”

and if God puts something in your heart and the only thing that is resisting that dream from becoming a reality is your life is fear, I am telling you... you have faith.

You have a TON of faith. But it is all in the wrong thing. That is all fear is. It is faith in the wrong thing.

I am warning you right now... for 2017, I am going to be a broken record when it comes to vision... until every last part of what God has given our church to accomplish is accomplished.

God told us to start a discipleship school... to buy houses in Detroit, and if my fear for what the market could do, or fear that the money won't keep coming in, or fear that we will get in over our heads blocks me from moving forward on that dream then the truth is absolutely clear. I have more faith in the broken systems of our world than I do in the God who I claim to believe holds the entire world in his hands.

The ONLY reason we haven't bought a house yet is because the right door hasn't opened yet. It doesn't scare me at all anymore.

But this year, like I asked you last week... I need your help... Lets knock down the doors. Lets figure out what is out there. God has given us a mission and I am ready to put all of my chips on the table for it.

I found this definition (Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible) of cowardly as it is used here in Revelation, the Greek word “*deilos*” (die-lass) and it is this:

“those who do not *quit themselves like men* so as to “overcome” in the good fight; who have the spirit of slavish “fear,” not love, towards God; and who through fear of man are not bold for God, or “draw back.””

And when I read that, it made me think about what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:15 -

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of **adoption** as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Do I want to be a slave? Or do I want to be adopted in God’s family? Because I already know, I AM a child of God. I have been adopted into his family. We all know the worship song that says “I am no longer a slave to fear, for I am a child of God.”

You have been adopted into the greatest family, for a bigger purpose.. but you forget who your Father is when you fall into fear, and it cripples you.

But look at this verse we read at the beginning in Revelation, this is verse 7:

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

One of the most famous parables that Jesus ever tells is the story of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32)

and in this story, this son spits in his Father’s face. He basically tells him, “dad, I wish you were dead! Give me my inheritance NOW!”

and so his Father gives his son his inheritance, and the son goes, and squanders it all. He loses everything that was meant to be his *later...* because he wanted it NOW.

and when he finally comes to his senses, look at what the bible says happened:

“when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned

against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:17-19)

So he returns home... and we know the story... The Father sees him from a distance, and he drops everything and he RUNS to his son... and they throw a party, and they kill the fatted calf...

The Father wouldn't even CONSIDER accepting his son as a slave... He was His Son. and nothing that boy could have ever done could ever change that fact.

But that son was so fearful of what the Father would do that it caused him to forget who he was.

Fear made him a slave. but He was always a son. The only thing that prevented him from living like a Son was something in his mind that told him: “you can't go home because of what you have done.” And finally, when he came to his senses, he came back, thinking, “I'll go home, but I will be a servant... even slavery would be better than what I am going through right now”

and I think so many people live their lives this way. They want to come back to God, and give everything to God, but they think that because of all of the things that they have screwed up in their lives, God's grace will accept them as a servant but never again as a son. Never again as someone who will actually be able to accomplish things for Jesus, and make an impact on the world for Jesus.

but what is so powerful when the prodigal son returns, is his Father said no no no no son. In my world, my son will never be a slave.

Fear makes free people live like slaves. It turns sons into servants... and the thing that is so crazy about it, is that they are only servants because it was what *they* choose.

The Father of the prodigal son would never accept his son to be his servant. But we are slaves to our own fear.

This is why we have to thaw of our cowardice if we are ever going to change our city. That has to change in us. We are adopted into the family of Christ... we cry out "Abba Father" because even when we aren't enough, HE STILL IS.

But we have to trust Him.

He did not call all of us to this broken place to just leave it broken.

but the truth is, it is easy to do nothing instead of doing something that has the chance of costing you something.

But I think that every single person who is on mission in Detroit needs to get your hearts around the idea that no matter what it costs you to be a part of the change, it could not possibly be worse than living a slave.

A slave to your fear. A slave to your stuff. A slave to your insecurity and indifference and anxiety.

Jesus tells us, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" -

which could also be said this way: Your heart will be enslaved to whatever it is that you *value*.

The truth is, the only way we will ever overcome fear, is with love... the only way we will act the way that God has called us to, is if we first can get our hearts around the treasure that he has given us, the people he has given us, the great city we get to minister in, the mission he has entrusted to us...

if that is our treasure, then what have we to fear?

I was thinking about that verse in Romans... about how we have been given a Spirit of adoption and we should never fall back into slavery... and I was thinking about that... about how often we fall back into slavery...

about how we get cold... and we let our hearts get cold... and we don't move when God says move; and I thought about that faucet in my house... and how Ben told me... "You have to keep the water flowing through those

pipes if you don't want them to freeze" and it made me think of something that Jesus says in the Gospel of John. And it specifically says in this passage, that Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit, and Jesus says:

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' ”

Now this is what is so powerful to me.

Jesus tells us: Whoever believes in me... the water will just keep on flowing. Out of his heart will flow RIVERS of living water.

But when you look at the verse we started with in Revelation... John is saying that we have this problem... this list of people, and he starts by saying they are cowards, and then the next thing he says is “they don't believe.”

Those who don't believe do not have rivers of living water flowing through them. They stop the work of the Holy Spirit before he can even do anything in their lives. So the Spirit is never working through them and therefore they aren't pointing anyone to Jesus.

But BEFORE John gives that list, he too mentions water... and its fascinating what he says: (and of course he is quoting God)

“To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”

All God is asking us to do is to stay thirsty.

We can't just stay the same. Thirst for what God has for you! Thirst, and it is YOURS! We can't just stay where we are and never grow... because even when it feels like we aren't growing, something is growing... and when we should be growing more and more loving, instead we are growing more and more calloused, and more and more numb... the pipes are beginning to freeze.

And that is why it is so important that we live Spirit filled lives, but not just for the power, because we pentecostals LOVE the power... but also for the guidance. Because Jesus wants to take you places that nobody else will go. And if you say yes, then in Him, you will be able to do anything.

But when there is no living water flowing through us, pipes start to freeze. We start to make lists of why we CAN'T do the things God called us to, rather than lists of WHY WE CAN. We think about what disqualifies us, instead of who qualifies us... instead of WHO died to qualify us. Because Jesus gave his very life so that we might find ours.

BUT We think about what could go wrong, instead of thinking about WHAT CAN BE! and what has potential TO BE!

And its easy to think - that we all say yes; but a lot of us say no, with the way that we live our lives.

We are cowards.
We are not faithful.

In another place (John 14:23) Jesus says: "If you love me, then you will do what I say."

So we show Jesus how much we love him when we obey HIM.

Each year, I try and start the year with a verse that we try and kind of make a foundation for us for the year... last year it was Isaiah 9... we started the year with it... we read it several times in several contexts throughout the year, and of course, we spent our last weeks of the year, the weeks in December studying it because really it is a Christmas passage... a prophecy about a child that was going to be born and turn the world world on its head and the entire government will be on his shoulder.

And so last year we just sort of determined from the beginning of the year, that here in Detroit, we were going to be a light in the darkest places... and as we continue that mission, we are going to add on to it a verse that I believe that God has given us for 2017. We will read it today... and probably a bunch more times this year.

And it is found in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 and this is what it says:

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. **Let all that you do be done in love.**”

Quite the opposite of the list we read in Revelation.

I had Sal and Krystal make little wood blocks with this verse on it and I gave them all to our executive team for Christmas, and this is what I told them then...

and this is why I believe that this verse is so powerful for where we have found ourselves as a church going into 2017... and you will hear this from me a lot this year...

But the first half of this passage, verse 13... I believe can be summed up as “be courageous.” The very thing that our church builds everything on... Courage.

Being willing to love the unlovable.

Being willing to go to the places that nobody else wants to go.

Being willing to meet people in messes that we know we can't solve on our own... AND YET being willing to dive head first INTO IT with the person who JUST NEEDS TO KNOW that “hey, you know what, this is bigger than you, and its bigger than me but at least you do NOT need to face this alone.”

But if you read this backwards... as in, verse 14, then verse 13... then you realize something amazing! and this is what God showed me so subtly when I was praying about this year.

Verse 14 says “Let all that you do be done in love.” another translation says “let EVERYTHING you do be done in love.”

but I realized... if we have this... if we have verse 14... if everything that we do this year is done in love...

then there is absolutely no reason to not have verse 13. There is no reason to not have courage. Because **God blesses things done in love**. He is with us in that. It is the greatest commandment that he ever gave us... LOVE your neighbor as yourself...

another time Jesus says it this way: A new commandment I give to you "LOVE ONE ANOTHER." (John 13:34)

In another place, the Apostle Paul writes (1 Corinthians 13) that if you could have it all... you could have all the spiritual gifts, and you could even give away everything that you have... and you could have knowledge and even faith... but if you don't have love then all of it is just noise.

Love is greater than faith. It is greater than hope. Love is greater than anything. It is the way the the Apostle John DEFINES God in 1 John 4. God is LOVE.

and as I thought about that, and about our church and our team and our mission... I realized that IF everything that we do is genuinely done in love... then there is no reason to be afraid of any of it. Of course, we use wisdom in everything that we do...

but if we have a house that we want to buy so that we can house more discipleship students and missions teams in, and disciple more people so that more people can be equipped to go out and LOVE our city more... then what is there to fear in that?

I see NOTHING worth fearing.

Why would we hesitate to move forward on things that bring others closer to Jesus, or on things that meet others basic human needs?

If we have an opportunity to buy a side lot and put a reconciliation table on it, where we can go out into the streets and bring back people who can never pay us back and throw them the greatest banquet they have ever received in their entire lives...

WHY WOULDN'T WE DO THAT?

If God speaks to you about doing something radically generous, maybe it is your first fruit offering, maybe it is something he is telling you to do for another person.. and on paper you aren't sure what it will mean for you... but YOU KNOW that you heard God say it, and YOU KNOW that you are giving in love... is there really anything to fear?

Is there really anything to be afraid of, when we are doing things for others?

No.

Of course we will have courage when we do that... because it is being done out of love!

If everything you do is done in love, then the Courage part becomes a no brainer!

If we think we are going one way, and then suddenly **we feel like God is redirecting our plans**, (because just like Proverbs 16:9 says... we can make our plans, but the LORD guides our steps)... **as long as we are still moving in a direction that is guided by love, ultimately church, whether we succeed or fail, we don't need to be afraid.**

This verse (1 Corinthians 16:13-14) actually, in a different way, perfectly encapsulates what the apostle John says in his first epistle (1 John 4:18)

“there is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear.”

It is so true.

Love and fear, they can't live together.

Really, anything Godly... it can't live with fear. Nothing will debilitate you from where you are supposed to be in a more overwhelming way than fear.

As long as there is fear, there is no faith, there is no hope, and there is no love.

So lets choose to get rid of the fear, so we can have everything else.