

Mission Possible

"The Great Adventure Continues"

Acts, Chapter 14 NIV

Psalms 33:12 NIV

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."

1 Timothy 2:1,2 NLT

"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity."

We'll always have people and personalities to navigate in this life, and Scripture is clear that we're to call them out by name before the Lord - to pray and intercede on their behalf. Some of the *good* news that we may not have seen last week includes these headlines:

1] *The Veteran's Administration rescinds punishment for chaplain and affirms sermons can be explicitly Christian - The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs has confirmed that chaplains can preach sermons with obviously Christian content at affiliated medical facilities, and has rescinded a letter of reprimand after a chaplain was punished this last year for delivering a Christian sermon at the Coatsville V.A. Medical Center in Pennsylvania. V.A. Secretary Doug Collins said, "There is no national or local policy or standard operating procedure which inhibits chaplains' sermons," and he also made it clear that the government has no business censoring anyone's sermon, including military chaplains.*

2] *Oklahoma fights back against atheist group's attack on school prayer - Oklahoma State Department of Education State Superintendent Ryan Walters has filed a lawsuit against the Freedom From Religion Foundation, an atheist legal group, over a dispute involving a school district's voluntary prayer policy, which the FFRF had demanded be prohibited because they claimed it violated an alleged "Separation of Church and State" clause in the U.S. Constitution. Ryan said, "Oklahoma will never be bullied by radical out-of-state atheists who use intimidation and harassment against kids. The FFRF has no stake in our schools, no authority over our communities, and absolutely no right to trample on the First Amendment...we will fight them at every turn!"*

The Great Adventure continues

Acts 13:49-52 NIV

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

If the Jesus we're following is boring, then we're not following the Jesus of the Bible. This is a great adventure that we're on, and it's not boring! The Book of Acts reads like an amazing adventure story where missionaries, starting with the Apostle Paul, go from place to place setting up outposts by establishing churches. When we step out into the Great Adventure, the first thing we will be met with will not be applause, “atta-boys”, or pats on the back - it will be absolute demonic resistance, often in the form of persecution (meaning *to chase down as if to apprehend*).

When that happens, the tendency for some people is to think that maybe they missed God somewhere. But, if we're experiencing resistance as we step out by faith into what God's called us to do and to be, then we can rest assured that we're right on track and we need to *stay the course*, because our enemy, the devil, wants us to stop.

Acts 14:1 NIV - Iconium

“At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.”

These were all brand new churches, and because of that, the people and many of their doctrines came off the rails. They were from pagan backgrounds with multiple gods that they had served and sacrificed to. Then Paul and Barnabas came preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and as they heard the Message of Christ, faith rose up in them and they were saved. By the foolishness of preaching, the Gospel was sent out across the world and continues to work today. We *hear* - faith *comes* - and our spirit gets born again as we say “Yes” to Jesus.

Acts 14:2,3 NIV

“But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.”

The Bible says that sowing dissension and division is one of the darkest sins there is. Any sin that is a violation of relationship is a heinous sin. The enemy knows that if he can divide us from our Heavenly Father and from each other, he can ruin the quality of our *fellowship*, and the intimacy, joy, and life that we draw from is diminished. It's our fellowship with God that *gives* life and *makes life* enjoyable and tolerable - and is what makes us able to live up in a very *down* and broken and fallen world.

Sin causes separation and is a violation of relationship, fellowship, and connection. One of the highest priorities of the enemy of our soul is to divide us from God and one another - from our *family*. God created us to live in connection. Connection is *protection*, and as soon as we sense a violation of relationship - when we're tempted to be angry, judge, criticize, or nitpick what we don't like - we need to ask the Holy Spirit to raise a red flag whenever we begin stepping into a violation of relationship.

If we step out for Jesus we will always be met with resistance, but it doesn't always come from whom we *think* it will. We might be shocked and surprised about who our critics are and where resistance comes from.

Acts 14:8-10 NIV - Lystra and Derbe

"In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw [discerned] that he had faith to be healed and called out, 'Stand up on your feet!' At that, the man jumped up and began to walk."

Paul aligned his words with what he discerned in the Spirit, and when he did that, something happened - *the man was instantly healed*.

Acts 14:19,20 NIV - Persecution happens

"Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe."

The disciples undoubtedly prayed for God to raise Paul up and to preserve his life. Paul then got up and went back to the city. He was fearless as he had already seen what was on the other side of death, and he was *not afraid* of it.

Acts 14:21,22 NIV

“Then They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.”

People were being saved and born again as they heard the Good News, and, afterwards they were encouraged and strengthened. Many people are “won” to Jesus without ever hearing that there is a very real cost - which is our *life*, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *“Jesus bids a man come and die!”*

Acts 14:26-28 NIV - Back in Antioch

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.”

They were celebrating the win, but they knew they weren’t done, so were probably praying, *“What next, Lord?”* Some of us might think we’re too old for that, but our retirement plan should be to see Jesus in Heaven - and until then, to work and not stop. That’s what we’re called to do, and that means *stewardship* on every level of our lives up to the finish line as we run through the tape.

Some of *us* are at a place in our life where it’s like half-time - where we’ve had enough disappointment to be frustrated and disillusioned as a Christian - afraid to do *anything* because we’re afraid of getting knocked back down by the enemy. We’ve been in it long enough to get hurt and disappointed - to have some prayers not get answered the way we wanted them to - or maybe we think not at all.

But, Jesus says, *“You can do this. You’ve got this. I’m with you and I won’t ever leave you or forsake you!”* We may be retired from our work, but we can’t retire from life, and we will *never* retire from the Kingdom of God. There will always be something for us to do - always be another assignment. We need to grab hold of the Caleb Spirit and become part of the Caleb Company. Caleb was eighty-five years old and said, *“Alright! I’m still in the game!”* ...are we?

Prayer

Father, in Jesus' name, for any of us who have felt like we can't keep going, we remember Paul, who surely struggled to stand to his feet after getting pummeled with rocks - but he didn't quit. He went right back into the same town where that horrible thing had happened to him that brought him to a near-death experience - to the threshold of eternity - and he walked right back, knowing they might do it again. Thank You for his example. Maybe when he entered the Third Heaven he got a glimpse of the heavenly host saying, "You've got got this! Keep going! Don't quit, Paul! We're with you! We're cheering you on! Jesus is with you! God has your back! The Holy Spirit is with you! It might hurt physically but you won't die spiritually. You don't have to give up!" Lord, give us grace to rise up with that same spirit of fight and might and say, "Not today, devil! You'll not take me out - you'll not take my courage or spirit or fire today - not today!" Thank You Jesus - we love You and honor You! In Jesus' name.

Amen

Resource

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