

THE DREAM TEAM AND THE CHURCH ALIVE

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A missionary society wrote to David Livingstone and asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."

Adoniram Judson sweated out Burma's heat for 18 years without a furlough, six years without a convert. Enduring torture and imprisonment, he admitted that he never saw a ship sail without wanting to jump on board and go home. When his wife's health broke and he put her on a homebound vessel in the knowledge he would not see her for two full years, he confided to his diary: "If we could find some quiet resting place on earth where we could spend the rest of our days in peace. . ." But he steadied himself with this remarkable postscript: "Life is short. Millions of Burmese are perishing. I am almost the only person on earth who has attained their language to communicate salvation. . ."

After being whisked out of Jerusalem and put on a cruise ship at Caesarea for Cilicia, Paul found himself back home in Tarsus. Here in all likelihood he was disinherited by his family. His statement to this effect is that for Christ's sake he had "suffered the loss of all things" (Phil. 3:8).

For some five or six years Paul was in and around the neighborhood of Tarsus. He had begun some Gentile evangelization on his own. For this he had endured intense hardships, sufferings, and privations. Of this he speaks autobiographically: "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft [He was constantly in imminent danger of death and of enduring its terrors]. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep [He was tossed about by the waves, clinging to a fragment of a wreck for twenty-four hours.]; in journeyings often, in perils of waters [He passed through treacherous river crossings.], in perils of robbers [Highway robbers were a common hazard in travels.], in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in

perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren [He experienced treachery of those who falsely professed to be his brethren in Christ, and yet endeavored to deliver him into the power of his enemies.]; in weariness and painfulness [exhaustion and suffering], in watchings often [sleepless nights which he was often compelled by business or suffering to pass], in hunger and thirst [Many times he went without food simply because there was none readily available.], in fastings often, in cold and nakedness [Often left out in the cold to pass the long night shivering sleeplessly].” 2 Cor. 11:23-27.

The greatest of the apostles here appears before us, his back lacerated by frequent scourgings, his body worn by hunger, thirst, and exposure; cold and naked, persecuted by Jews and Gentiles, driven from place to place without any certain dwelling. This passage, more perhaps than any other, makes even the most laborious of the modern ministers of Christ hide their face in shame. What have they ever done or suffered to compare with what this apostle did?

Which begs the question, Why did he do it? “The love of Christ constraineth us,” says the apostle. The motive that prompted Christ to leave heaven, the sacrifice He manifested in coming to this world to die, is what draws men unto Himself.

A missionary in Africa was once asked if he really liked what he was doing. His response was shocking, “Do I like this work?” he said. “No. My wife and I do not like dirt. We have reasonable refined sensibilities. We do not like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse. But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? God pity him, if not. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to “Go, and we go. Love constrains us.”

And it is when we possess this spirit that we gather with Christ. Works of sacrifice, however inferior they may appear unto men, are wholly fruitful. The life principle is in its own nature, originating with God and His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. A small beginning with such a spirit results in great good. It is not so much the amount a person does, as it is the spirit which prompts the action, and the sacrifice it requires in performing it. It is powerful to win hearts. There is the power of wealth, the power of intellect, combined with physical energy. This may affect men’s heads. Men will submit from policy to such means, and intellectually to sound reason; but it is the true spirit of sacrifice that affects hearts. “Like begets like.” If we possess it, others will voluntarily partake of it, and this with cheerfulness and joy.

When Hudson Taylor was director of the China Inland Mission, he often interviewed candidates for the mission field. On one occasion, he met with a group of applicants to determine their motivations for service. "And why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?" he asked one. "I want to go because Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature?" was the reply. Another said, "I want to go because millions are perishing without Christ?" Others gave different answers. Then Hudson Taylor said, "All of these motives, however good, will fail you in times of testings, trials, tribulations, and possible death. There is but one motive that will sustain you in trial and testing; namely, the love of Christ?"

It was probably during these hidden years in Tarsus that Paul was given the mysterious experience described in his own words: "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." 2 Cor. 12:2-4.

A man in Christ means a Christian man, a man in his character as a Christian. To Paul's consciousness the wonderful experience he is about to describe was not natural. It did not befall him as a man simply, still less as an epileptic patient; it was an unmistakably Christian experience.

It happened fourteen years ago. The date of this rapture would be about 44 A.D. This forbids us to connect it in any way with Paul's conversion, which must have been twenty years earlier than this letter. The event was unique in his experience. It was one, solitary, incomparable experience, including in it a complex of visions and revelations granted by Christ.

The tree of life is "in the midst of the Paradise of God." The tree of life is on either side of the river of life. Rev. 22:2. The river of water of life proceeds directly from the throne of God. Rev. 22:1. When Paul was "caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words," he was in "the third heaven." 2 Cor. 12:2-4. Therefore Paradise,—the place where are found the tree and the river of life,—is in the third heaven, and is the dwelling-place of God. It is the place to which the saints will be taken when they are raised from the dead and made

immortal at the second advent, for “they shall see his face,” and shall be “before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” Paradise is the place of God’s throne.

God honored Paul by granting him visions and revelations, and by taking him to heaven; but He honored him further by permitting him to hear “unspeakable words” while he was in heaven. He overheard the divine secrets that are shared only in heaven. These things could be spoken by God and by beings in heaven, but they could not be spoken by men.

Even Moses, who was intimate with God, met the Lord on the mountaintop; but Paul met the Lord in Paradise. There is no doubt that this vision of God’s glory was one of the sustaining powers in Paul’s life and ministry. No matter where he was—in prison, in the deep, in dangerous travels—he knew that God was with him and that all was well.

You and I are not going to heaven until Jesus returns. But we have a marvelous encouragement in the fact that we are today seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). With him we have a position of authority and victory “far above all” where it cannot be stolen from us. While we have not seen God’s glory as Paul did, we do share God’s glory now. We have the privilege of confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, in our flesh; and He is the glory of God. And one day we shall enter into heaven and behold the glory of Christ (John 17:24).

This experience was evidently a great thing to him. It was the most sacred privilege and honor he had ever known; it was among his strongest sources of inspiration; it had a powerful tendency to generate spiritual pride; and it had its accompaniment, and its counter-weight, in his sharpest trial. The world knows little of its greatest men; perhaps we very rarely know what are the great things in the lives even of the people who are round about us. Paul had kept silence about this sublime experience for fourteen years, and no man had ever guessed it; it had been a secret between the Lord and His disciple; and they only, who were in the secret, could rightly interpret all that depended upon it. There is a kind of profanity in forcing the heart to show itself too far, in compelling a man to speak about, even though he does not divulge, the things that it is not lawful to utter.¹

¹ “The apostle Paul early in his Christian experience was given special opportunities to learn the will of God concerning the followers of Jesus. He was

Due to the remarkable nature of the truths—the divine revelations he received from the Lord Jesus—he needed an affliction to keep him humble. “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” 2 Cor. 12:7.

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was not removed, although he thrice besought the Lord that it might depart from him. Therefore he gloried in infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Sometimes Christ is glorified by the patient’s suffering, or even by the death, of his faithful followers, and therefore the Christian should pray that he may recover if it will be for the glory of God. “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” We do not always know what will be for the best. We are zealous to work for the Lord; and when we are afflicted we feel like a prisoner of war, who, in his anxiety to be in the battle, beats against his prison bars. We are in danger of imagining that the Lord needs us in the field, forgetting that he knows best, and may require us to serve him in affliction, and that he can get along without any of our service.

And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

‘caught up to the third heaven,’ ‘into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.’ He himself acknowledged that many ‘visions and revelations’ had been given him ‘of the Lord.’ His understanding of the principles of gospel truth was equal to that of ‘the very chiefest apostles.’ 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4, 1, 11. He had a clear, full comprehension of ‘the breadth, and length, and depth, and height’ of ‘the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.’ Ephesians 3:18, 19.

Paul could not tell all that he had seen in vision; for among his hearers were some who would have misapplied his words. But that which was revealed to him enabled him to labor as a leader and a wise teacher, and also molded the messages that he in later years sent to the churches. The impression that he received when in vision was ever with him, enabling him to give a correct representation of Christian character. By word of mouth and by letter he bore a message that ever since has brought help and strength to the church of God. To believers today this message speaks plainly of the dangers that will threaten the church, and the false doctrines that they will have to meet.” Acts of the Apostles, pp. 469, 470.

During the disastrous running of the 54th Sydney-Hobart yacht race a huge wave snatched Glen Picasso off the distressed yacht *Solo Globe Challenger*. The situation was quickly resolved in an Aussie way. Still attached to the boat by a safety harness Picasso was being dragged under water. As his life flashed before his eyes he said to himself “this harness better not break.” Suddenly the harness went limp, he stopped, put up his hand and touched the stern of the boat. Seeing him there, crewmate and friend Mowbray yelled: “Cyril stop flailing around and get back on board.”

Sailors on the high seas understand the importance of securing themselves to something sturdy in a fierce gale. You need to cling to what’s secure in a storm, that’s the Rock Christ Jesus.

“Every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Ps. 39:5); but “power belongeth unto God.” Ps. 62:11. Tribulation discovers to us our weakness. But if we learn the full lesson, then the trouble that reveals our helplessness, at the same time reveals the infinite power of God, who is “a very present help in trouble.” Christ does not fail, nor become discouraged. He bears the burden of the whole world, with all its sin and misery; yet He declares that His “burden is light.” Matt. 11:30. In all His conflict with Satan, He had perfect peace; in all the weight of affliction that was laid on Him, the joy of the Lord was His strength. The victory was His continually, and if we believe it we can say, “Thanks be unto God, which causeth us to triumph in Christ.” 2 Cor. 2:14. Is it not clear that tribulation, which simply reveals more perfectly the presence of the mighty Comforter, who Himself is afflicted in all our afflictions, and who bears all our burdens, is itself a joy?

In the meantime, a flourishing church of Christ had developed in Antioch, a hundred miles to the south of Paul’s center of activities in Tarsus. This was an ethically diverse church with very little knowledge of the Word of God. What did a church like this need if it was not to go off in one crazy direction after the other? Obviously, it needed sound teaching. In order to have that, it needed someone to teach the new converts. Who could do it? Who was capable of that kind of systematic teaching for Gentiles?

The late Leonard Bernstein, composer and famed conductor of the world-renowned New York Philharmonic, was asked what he believed to be the most difficult instrument in the orchestra to play. He responded, “Second fiddle!”

An eight-year-old wanted to play soccer. His daddy hadn't played one minute of soccer. They showed up for the first day of practice, and the young father discovered, to his dismay, no one had stepped up to coach. You guessed it—he got the job. Facing an eager team of eight-year-olds itching to kick the cover off the soccer ball, though a novice, he dived in headfirst.

He didn't have a clue how to organize the offense, let alone how to strategize the defense. He didn't even know the rules of the game. After about the third or fourth hour with these boys, he realized they needed more than "Go out there and get 'em. I don't know what you're supposed to do, but go out there and get 'em. Atta boy, you can do it." Much to his delight, one of the other fathers witnessed his futile attempts to coach, and volunteered to help. Not only had the man coached soccer in the past, he had played the game for years. The father admitted, "Suddenly he and I became very good friends." He gladly retreated to the role of assistant coach and official encourager. Barnabas did the same thing in Antioch.

Barnabas had been sent as an official delegate from Jerusalem. He rejoiced at what was happening in Antioch and encouraged the work. Then he went out of his way to get a man he had known years before in Jerusalem and whom he recognized as being just the one to help the church. He thought of Paul.

Where was he? He made the journey from Antioch to Tarsus. "Saul, I have come to take you to Antioch, to help the church there. You are just the man for the job. There is great opportunity there. Come with me." So he brought him to Antioch.

Now it's there, we learn "the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Followers of Jesus were described as "disciples," "saints," "believers," "brothers and sisters," "witnesses." They were also known as the followers of "the Way."

Ironside says that when he was traveling in China years ago he was frequently introduced as "Yasu-yan." At first he did not know what the word meant, but he asked about it and learned that *Yasu* was the Cantonese word for Jesus, and *yan* was "man." So he was being introduced as a "Jesus man," which is fine, because that is what a Christian really is.

The believers in Antioch were first called Christ's man—Jesus' man. Antioch was a cosmopolitan city, where Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian rubbed shoulders, where Mediterranean civilization met the Syrian desert; racial and religious differences which loomed so large

in Judaea seemed much less important here. The church of Antioch from the outset had a public persona quite distinct from that of the Jerusalem church. The pagans of Antioch, too, knew all about these people, for the Christians did not keep quiet about their faith, but proclaimed it wherever they went. To the pagans of Antioch the name Christ was simply the name of a man of whom these people were always talking: a curious name, to be sure. “Who are these people?” one Antiochene would ask another, as two or three unofficial missionaries gathered a group of more or less interested hearers and debaters around them in one of the city colonnades. “O, these are the people who are always talking about Christos, the Christ-people, the Christians.” and so it was in Antioch, says Luke, that the followers of Jesus first came to be popularly known as Christians.

David Fuller has asked the question, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” The first thing that pagans should think when they hear the name Seventh-day Adventist is, Oh, those are the folks who are always talking about Christ and the cross. Not the Democrats or Republicans, not the Green Party or the Independents, but those who belong to the Party of Christ!

The growth pattern of the church at Antioch would have made Doug Batchelor’s head spin! The staff was the century-one Dream Team. “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas [son of encouragement], and Simeon that was called Niger [meaning “black,” he may have come from Africa], and Lucius of Cyrene [He was a missionary from the isle of Cyprus who went as a missionary to Antioch and raised up the church], and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul [An intimate friend of Herod Antipas, who had killed John the Baptist.].” Acts 13:1. The believers in Antioch were under the influence of five choice prophets, preachers and teachers *par excellence*. Each was called, gifted, devoted, and set apart for the Lord’s work. That’s exactly what the growing new church needed. The congregation loved it because they got substantial truth, incredible encouragement, and great worship. This was no religious entertainment center that dumbed down the truth. The place thrived on the solid meat of the Word.

Nowadays the people want a pop culture religion. A user-friendly church that will stroke us the right way and get to our feelings; something that will resonate with our feel-good needs; but the Lord

knows what a church needs and He sends them Spirit-directed messengers to lead them in present times. Every prophet or forthteller, every teacher the Lord sends to a church, has something special to bring to the body. As long as you have them learn, grow, be thankful, for what the Lord has provided. God's teachers help to ground the believers in the doctrines of the faith.

Now you wouldn't pick a restaurant to eat if you knew that there were roaches and rats in the kitchen. The food could be contaminated and make you sick. Neither should you pick a church where the preacher is all fluff and careless with his handling of the Word. Your Christianity suffers becoming anemic, weak, and meaningless.

Every great restaurant has one primary element that draws crowds night after night, week after week, and year after year. Great food! Now what makes the difference between a great restaurant and a mediocre restaurant is the chef: the better the chef, the better the food. Antioch served the best spiritual, Bible-based food in Cilicia. It was prepared to near perfection by a group of great chefs.

Saul fit that group like a master chef fits a great restaurant. I would have loved to have been a part of that congregation. It must have been magnificent to listen to Saul of Tarsus open the ancient scrolls of the Old Testament and teach God's Word.

Great truths such as the Apostle taught but have been long forgotten over the course of time are due to be resurrected from his writings and brought before the people of our generation. They are basic and essential to counteract the toxic fodder that is being served in so many churches today. We need the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ—the Third Angel's Message—to prepare us for His soon coming.

From the church at Antioch officially sending out foreign missionaries we can learn many important principles about the missionary involvement of churches. How the church came to recognize this call of God is instructive. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Acts 13:2. The beginnings of the missions of Jesus and the apostles are preceded by prayer; which provides opportunity for action of the Spirit; and the Spirit leads directly to mission. Prayer is viewed here as a service we do for God. To this is added fasting. Fasting emphasizes a state of

uninterrupted concentration which made it possible to ascertain the will of the Lord. That is the main purpose and value of fasting.

“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Acts 13:3. The message the church received was to release their best for missionary service, and their earnestness was such that they were willing to do so. This is typical of churches that have a missionary vision, churches whose main aim is more than survival or maintenance. Mission is so important to them that they willingly take steps that may seem harmful to the church in order for the missionary program to thrive. They have a corporate orientation towards others.

The history of missions is replete with great leaps forward that took place when people got together to pray. In the Haystack Meeting of 1806, some students from Williams College, who had a concern for the spiritual welfare of their fellow students, met twice a week for prayer. Because they were ridiculed, they met outside the college in the countryside. One day five of them got caught in a storm and sought refuge under a haystack. While they waited there they prayed, and their special focus of prayer was the awakening of foreign missionary interest among students. Their leader, Samuel Mills, directed the discussion and praying to their own missionary obligation. He said, that unless students dedicated their lives to foreign evangelism, the gospel would not be taken to places like Asia. He exhorted his friends with the words that later became like a watchword for them: “We can do this if we will.”

After some discussion these five students offered their lives to foreign missions. This gave birth to the first student missionary society in America. It was from this haystack meeting that the foreign missionary movement of the churches of the United States had an initial main impulse. This has been described as setting in motion “a golden chain stretching from the haystack meeting to the greatest student uprising in all history. Urgent prayer arising from a desire for all that God wishes makes us receptive to him and inspires a great leap forward in the history of the church.

The Spirit directed Barnabas and Saul to be set apart for reaching the lost. “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.” Acts 13:4. These were the top leaders of the church, and the young church in Antioch presumably had many needs. But when God calls, we must release even those we consider the most important and valued persons.

That's how important missions is. One does not have to be brilliant (humanly speaking) to be a missionary. One has to be called, and God often calls ordinary, unspectacular people to do special things for Him. But sometimes he sends the most talented. When brilliant people respond to the missionary call, we may say, "What a waste! Their audience will be uneducated, backward people. Why should the most brilliant go to them?" But throughout history God has called some of the brightest people in their generation to the mission field—for example, John Nevin Andrews went to Europe; Ellen G. White went to Australia; E. J. Waggoner went to London; and Elder Cudney and Bro. Tay went to the South Pacific islands and Pitcairn. As David Livingstone said, "God had only one son and He was a missionary."

John Eldredge describes a river that winds its way through southern Oregon, running down from the Cascades to the coast, which has also wound its way through my childhood, carving a path in the canyons of my memory. As a young boy I spent many summer days on the Rogue.

There is rock that juts out over that river called Jumping Rock. It is perched above the river at about the height of a two-story house plus some, tall enough that you can slowly count to five before you hit the water. There's a faculty built into the human brain that makes every cliff seem twice the height when you're looking down from the top and everything in you says, Don't even think about it.

So you don't think about it, you just hurl yourself off out into the middle of the canyon, and then you free-fall for what feels like enough time to recite the Gettysburg Address and all of your senses are on maximum alert as you plunge into the cold water down below.

After that first jump you have to do it again, partly because you can't believe you did it, and partly because the fear has given way to the thrill of such freedom.

I want to live my whole life like that. I want to love with much more abandon and stop waiting for others to love me first. I want to hurl myself into a creative work worthy of God.

Are you there? Okay, take a deep breath. Smile. Now jump! Good for you! Let the adventure begin.