

Unstoppable...Life is like a Rollercoaster

8/3/19 – Pastor Randy

My title of this series is “Unstoppable”. I have chosen that title because the story of the early church is a story of dramatic growth and dynamic demonstrations of the Holy Spirit’s power in the face of extreme opposition. The history of the early church recorded in Acts is nothing short of a spiritual rollercoaster ride; a rollercoaster without any security bars and belts!!

It wasn’t until I was about 14 years old that I experienced my first rollercoaster ride. It was at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson NJ. At that time great adventure had this awesome new rollercoaster called “Lightning Loops”. I was a little scared but there was no way I was going to reveal that. I locked the bars. Mine still went up to my head. Last thing I wanted to do is look like I was baby. The attendant came over and said “Oh wow” and promptly removed me from that car. That is my translation to make it suitable for all audiences.

Life is like a rollercoaster? You have ups and downs, highs and lows, peaks and valleys. We experience trials and triumph, success and failure, pleasure and pain, praise and persecution.

Today my comments are specifically related to the ups and downs that accompany our service to God. All of us are called to serve God, to contribute to the expansion of God's kingdom; to the growth of his body, the church. Most people live their lives seeking a life of all highs and no lows, or at least they attempt to attain as many highs as possible and avoid as many lows as possible. The Christian, however, is not concerned primarily with how to achieve highs and avoid lows, but with fulfilling God's purpose and responding properly to highs and lows!

As we live our lives focused on the will of God; inspired by His love, truth, & power; motivated by a desire to bring honor to the name of Christ we can expect to encounter **both** trials and triumph; tragedy and victory. What is critical is that we respond properly to both!

The ministry of Paul & Barnabas provides us with an example of a pretty extreme rollercoaster ride.

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In Acts 13 – 14 we have a summary of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. You want to talk about a rollercoaster ride? Listen to this: *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit... they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews....When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with **the proconsul, Sergius Paulus**, a man of intelligence, who **summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.***

BUT Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **BUT** Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. **Then the proconsul believed, when he saw** what had occurred, for **he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.**

The first missionary journey starts out powerfully. The opposition was immediately squashed and the governor, a man of great influence, was converted to Christianity. Let's see what happens next:

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

*As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath... The next Sabbath **almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.***

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BUT when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And **the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.**

BUT the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, **stirred up persecution** against Paul and Barnabas, **and drove them out** of their district. **BUT** they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And **the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**

As chapter 14 begins, we find Paul and Barnabas in the city of Iconium. Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that **a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.**

BUT the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Paul and Barnabas continued to preach and God continued to do miracles which added credibility to their message. At the same time the “poisoning of people’s minds” against them was also effective. It initially hindered belief but turned into an anger and hatred which triggered an actual assault against Paul and Barnabas, causing them to run for their lives.

They fled from the immediate danger, but not from their mission! They went to other cities preaching the gospel.

And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also

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are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God... Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

BUT *Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*

BUT *when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on **the next day he went** on with Barnabas **to Derbe**. When they had **preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch**, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God**.*

We must get clear in our heads. Trials and triumph are BOTH a part of the Christian's experience - Even the Spirit-filled Christians experience. We need God's grace to RESPOND appropriately to both.

I. HANDLING TRIUMPH WITH GOD'S GRACE

A lot of messages, articles, and books have addressed the subject of how to deal with trials, troubles, difficulties and disappointments, but not so much when it comes to the subject of how we respond to triumph, success, adulation & achievement. The truth is, there are pitfalls associated with both the experience of triumph as well as trouble.

A. STAY HUMBLE – Success leaves us vulnerable to pride. If you are constantly experiencing one defeat after another you are probably not as likely to be afflicted with pride. Paul and Barnabas experienced great success on their first missionary journey together. After they shared in the Synagogue that forgiveness and freedom were through Christ the people begged them to come back. I've been thanked, but no one has ever begged me to preach more. At Lystra, Paul and Barnabas faced a great temptation to succumb to the sin of pride. A man, unable to walk since birth was healed through them. The people began to treat them like "gods", but Paul & Barnabas tore their robes and pleaded with them to stop praising them and give glory to God.

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B. STAY DEPENDENT UPON GOD.

Humility helps us avoid pride and self-sufficiency. Success can seduce us into thinking that we don't need God. Timothy tells the rich to not only beware of the tendency for riches to lead to arrogance, but to also beware of the tendency to FIX OUR HOPE on them. Once success influences us to think we are something special, we easily forget that we need God. After the Israelites exhilarating victory at Jericho they experienced an embarrassing defeat at Ai. Why? Jericho was the result of listening to God. All communication with God is conspicuously absent at Ai. Joshua took God for granted.

C. STAY CONTENT IN CHRIST

Another danger we face when we experience moments of triumph is the potential of becoming so enthralled with success and exhilarated by triumph that they become our source of contentment. If my last point warned against self-sufficiency this point warns us against self-satisfaction. If we fall in love with success and triumph, we can quickly find ourselves falling out of love with God. If you discover that your contentment is based upon your outward circumstances, you are in trouble. Our source of contentment must be the presence of Christ not the blessing of Christ. Phil. 4:11,12

D. STAY ON MISSION.

I will say more about this in a minute but for now beware of allowing triumph to lull you into a sense of having arrived. Until Jesus comes this is much work to be done!

I. HANDLING TRIALS WITH GOD'S GRACE

For the few of us here who have more trials than triumphs, we need some guidance and encouragement from the Lord.

A. DON'T HAVE A PITY PARTY

You are not alone! Why me? Look at what Paul & Barnabas faced! First, they experienced rejection. Then they were driven out of the city! In the next city they had to leave to avoid being killed!! Then, after the healing at Lystra, their opponents stoned Paul, and only by the grace of God did he survive.

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I believe that discouragement and self-pity form a two-headed monster that poses the greatest threat to Christians.

“Pity is one of the most noble emotions available to human beings; self-pity is possibly the most ignoble...it is an incapacity, a crippling emotional disease that severely distorts our perception of reality...a narcotic that leaves its addicts wasted and derelict.” -Eugene Peterson

Do you know who throws pity-parties? The Devil. Stop attending the Devil's parties! Make a decision today to stop accepting his pity-party invitations. Throw them away. Don't even open them up!!!

B. DON'T EXCHANGE EVIL WITH EVIL.

There is a difference between using force to resist and restrain violence and using force as vengeance. God physically punished Elymas. Paul didn't lay a hand on him. Leave judgment to the Lord.

C. EXPECT THEM – Don't expect the worst, but do be prepared for trials. When we live with an unrealistic expectation that we are exempt from difficulty we set ourselves up for disappointment. Paul reminded himself and others that hardships await those who will enter the Kingdom of God.

D. DON'T QUIT DOING GOOD!

What I love about Paul and Barnabas is that every time they experienced trials they just moved along and kept serving God; following his will. Paul was almost killed with stones. Yes, God saved him, but he was still sore! The next day he was preaching in another city! Galatians 6:9 challenges us to “not lose heart in doing good. In due time you will reap a reward, if you don't grow weary and quit.” Our greatest reason to “never give up” is not Paul, but Jesus. Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame. What joy? The joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

We need to constantly remind ourselves of what Christ has done for us and what he promised to do for us!! Jesus is our GREATEST GIFT...

Trials are temporary and God our Father is FAITHFUL!!

Jesus didn't stop at the garden. He didn't quit when they beat his back. He didn't quit after the thorns were pressed on his head or after the nails pierced his hands and feet!! He is not a quit you God but a with you God!!