

The Unstoppable Christian

In Matthew's recording of Jesus' instruction on prayer, the first request made was that God's Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6). How God grants this request can entirely be up to Him. But God has chosen to make humanity stakeholders in the dignity of laboring for His Kingdom. All those who walk according to God's purpose for their lives and in their generation are kingdom laborers. There are four areas that Christians are equipped to fulfil God's purposes concerning their lives: talent, gift, occupation and responsibility. Our talents are our natural and unique ability or skill (for instance: football, sketching, writing, poetry, dancing, craftsmanship, singing and the like). The supernatural grace for ministry such as preaching, leadership, giving, prayer, speaking in tongues, healing, intercession, and encouragement could be considered as gifting. Our vocation would be our skilled or professional area of endeavor such as medicine, teaching, banking, engineering, marketing, trading, and military service and so on. Our place and role in the family or in the society constitute our natural or social responsibilities. When we commit ourselves in diligence in these areas of our lives we are laboring to bring God's reign upon the earth and as such we are stakeholders in the answer to the prayer of Jesus.

One of the early Christians who was deeply committed to his life's purpose was the apostle Paul. Paul's commitment to God's reign on earth was in his life and work as a missionary to the gentiles. Paul was a powerful servant of God. But Paul gives a rather shocking account of his willingness to be with the Thessalonian Christians but was stopped by Satan (I Thess. 2:18). The weight of this statement may vary along theological and hermeneutical line. However, taking it for what it is, Paul is referring to the obstruction of his intention by the devil. If Satan could hinder this great apostle from accomplishing one of the goals that constituted his calling for God's kingdom among the Thessalonian believers, then we must give some attention to the phenomenon of being stopped from promoting and accomplishing our lives' God-given goals.

We are told of many other instances in which Satan tried hindering God's children. In Genesis 3:1-8 we are told that the serpent came and deceived Eve and Adam into disobeying God, thereby resulting in their being kicked out of the beautiful Eden garden. When Jesus came to accomplish His salvific work for humanity, Matthew records that during his period of fast in the wilderness, the devil tempted Him to a fall with food, showmanship and power (Matt. 4).

Some of the common denominators in the lure to stop believers from kingdom accomplishment are: removing the Word of God from an authoritative place in the life of the believer, a play on our vulnerability in times of need and mere instances of inexplicable frustrations. Satan tried to convince Eve that God did not mean literal death if they ignored His command in the Eden garden. He raised an argument that was to stand in contradiction to the instruction that God had given to them. In the case of Jesus, Satan met Him in His time of hunger and began to poke at His need for food. The need that Jesus had to convince the world to believe in God's offer of salvation through Him was also jabbed at when Satan tried to ask Jesus to impress people with signs and wonders for easy recruitment to faith. In the case of Paul, the account of being hindered by Satan was not explained but it bore undertones of sudden surprise and frustration in the face of an earnest desire for a pastoral visit.

In what ways can we become unstoppable at every instance of an attempt to hinder us from God's purpose concerning us? We can find an answer in how Jesus responded to the temptation He faced in the wilderness.

Becoming Unstoppable

The Difference between Eve and Jesus in their encounters with Satan the stopper is that Jesus did not engage in a conversation regarding the meaning of the Word of God like Eve did. There is a time and place for interpretation but as long as the critical moment of temptation is concerned, Jesus could not afford the luxury of anything short of using the Word of God as an authoritative principle. Jesus simply said to Satan ‘...it is written...’ and such swift use of the written Word to counter the tempter was effective until the eventual end of the trying process.

The use of the written Word is powerful. Jesus kept using the weapon of the written Word until Satan’s ultimate defeat. The first Corinthian epistle records that if it were known to the rulers of this world that the death of Jesus was in accordance with the written chronicle for the actualization of the intended salvation to all humanity, they would not have crucified Him (I Cor. 2:8). The demonstration of the wisdom of God is in the power and integrity of His Word. The exact way that Jesus overcame the moments intended to hinder His purpose and destiny, according to Matthew 4, was through the activating and the declaring of the authoritative Word.

In response to the first temptation in which Jesus was asked to turn stones into bread, Jesus captures the principle in Deuteronomy 8:3 which presents God’s Word as superior to food. He rightly activates this written form of the passage and declares it to the hearing of Satan. Against this, the tempter had no further argument. This process of capture, activate and declare is repeated in the second and the third temptations. The second temptation Jesus was faced with was to throw Himself from a high point and the angels will catch Him as Psalm 91 testifies. To this lure to impress people quickly about His messianic figure and person Jesus captions the authoritative sentence in Deuteronomy 6:16, saying that God must never be put to test. Satan again realized the supremacy of this statement and said nothing to counter it. Finally, Jesus was asked to bow in worship to Satan in exchange for power but Jesus repeats His winning formula - ‘it is written’. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:13 saying that the only One deserving of worship and service was the Lord God. After this, Satan gave up trying!

When we want to understand the Word of God, we read it in context; when we want to apply the Word of God, there is a place for declaring it as an authoritative and undebatable principle! This attitude is rooted in the acceptance of the Word of God as valid and dynamic. It is something for us to capture the revelatory power of scripture, activate it as a powerful principle that when declared in the right situation, topples deceptive attacks from the archenemy of God’s purpose concerning us.

The instances that require such an application may be tempting times of sickness, fear, confusion, failure, death, attacks, conspiracy, feelings of tiredness and helplessness. The written Word of God has principles that rightly apply as declarative missiles to shatter such bad experiences, if they are not God-intended. Against times of fear, it is written in Isaiah 53:5, ‘by his (Jesus’) stripes we are healed’. To the circumstances of fear it is written in II Tim 2:7 that God has not given us the Spirit of fear but of love and power and sound mind. To counter the trying times of dark clouds of confusion it is written in Prov.3:6 ‘...and He (God) shall direct your paths’. The fear of failure is also addressed in scripture in Isaiah 41:10 where God is recorded as saying ‘I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness’. The threatening whispers of death find a scriptural response in Psalm 27:2 which says ‘...when the wicked shall come against me to eat of my flesh may they stumble and fall’. The use of harmful weapons against God’s children is equally countered by the written Word which says, in Isaiah 54:16, that no weapon formed against us shall prosper and that condemnation is upon any tongue that rises against us. The plots of men in conspiracy against us as God’s children equally have a scriptural authoritative response in Isaiah 54:15, which says ‘...whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake’. Feelings of weakness and depressing tiredness can be overcome through Isaiah 40:29 which says that God gives

power to the weak! In moments of an overwhelming sense of helplessness God's Word says that God is our helper (Psalm 54:4).

These are but a few among the many trying moments we are bound to face and how God's Word addresses such situations. Our victory is not meant to last for a moment. It is supposed to be sustained. How can this happen for us?

Staying Unstoppable

James 5:16 mentions that we confess our trespasses to one another, and pray for one another for healing because the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. A habit of prayerful travail is a sure way to stay unstoppable. There are two manners of prayer: prayer of stating a request and prayer of travail in earnest expectation for something to happen. When Jesus was praying for His disciples in John 17, He simply stated requests to the Father on how he would want his disciples to be united, sanctified and so on. But when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Luke 22:44, He prayed more earnestly, in anguish such that His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus stayed unstoppable by going in the depth of fervency in prayer, especially at the most crucial moment in the garden of Gethsemane, where under the weight of the cost, was tempted to back out on saving the world.

What is the nature of such prayer?

Persistence is a central quality to this kind of prayer. David mentions in Psalm 123:2 that as the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy. The adjective of time 'until' indicates that the act of looking up to the Lord in prayer and earnest expectation will never cease except the desired becomes a reality.

But what do we do while we await the expiration of our 'until'? The activities that characterize a waiting period of earnestness can be likened to incubation or pregnancy. The seed in the womb is nurtured deep within and kept safe until the season of delivery. The incubation process consists of a deliberate brooding until the expected result is recorded. This means to hold unto the captured word of promise. It means to bear it in one's spirit like a pregnancy or the brooding space of incubation, through fervent prayer, until it is brought forth into reality at the maturity of time or the dawning of the appointed season.

Calling forth the thing we hope for through the substance of faith and making them evident through our utterance and imagination is what we do in fervent prayer. Dealing with an expectation in terms of reality is also a character of God. The Roman epistle mentions how God **is the One** *who quickeneth the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were* (4:17). The Prophet Elijah in I Kings 18 portrayed this quality when the word of God that came through him, indicating that there shall be rain after a long time of draught. Elijah goes away to bury his head in prayer so as to call his utterance into existence. He did so repeatedly until the expected report came

May God help us to stay unstoppable through His unfailing Word and through Fervent Prayer!

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