

## God's generals (aka no place for cowards)

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January 2019

### Basics

When 73 year old brother Clifford Edwards came to our *Lighthouse Jersey church* service on Sunday, 27 January 2019, I wasn't expecting to hear him announce boldly: **"Christianity is not for cowards"**.

You see he knew this from experience.

In February 1996 the doctor gave him 6 months to live as a result of irreversible brain damage and the latter stages of Cirrhosis, a disease of the liver – the effects of alcoholism. In the last week of his life, in August 1996 when his apartment smelt the smell of death, he eventually turned to the God who he had previously doubted existed. He prayed his most earnest prayer:

*"Heavenly father, I have turned my back from you for so long. Will you forgive me? Even though I have nothing to offer, you can have every breath I have left"*

God heard the prayer of this previously homeless man of 20 years, one who had slept on cardboard boxes under the arches outside London's Embankment station to be his disciple – going around to the [highways and byways of England, Northern Ireland and then the Northern Hemisphere](#) .

In the process, the last breath he was expecting in August 1996 turned into a miracle as God healed him from his disease in order for the message of hope to go out there for the next 20 years. When he visited our church, he was in his 23<sup>rd</sup> year of additional breath – which the Spirit used to remind me about the Lord's call to us all:

*"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

God is even more serious about this. In one of the most sobering places about how serious this is. Here is a list of people who WILL NOT BE IN HEAVEN according to revelation 21: 8

*"But the **cowardly**, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

Can you imagine someone who is cowardly is in the exact same place as a murderer? God's ways and thoughts and standards are as you can see are much higher than our own – and very different from us hence why we should listen to him!

You see the call of God is a call to the wilderness and that is no country for cowards – people ashamed of Christ, he will be ashamed of them too<sup>ii</sup>, as the bible shows.



## Those who have gone before us..... Examples from the bible.

God's generals past were always challenged by him - they were called to epic battles, show downs, sacrifices and denial of self. They were willing to die for their faith – even in the face of persecution.

You really cannot escape the reality. If you want to be considered worthy by Jesus, to receive his commendation: "*well done good and faithful servant*"<sup>iii</sup> then you must die to self, take up your cross, and forget yourself. Forget mother and father, brother and sister – and follow the call of the wild where the Spirit calls, you will hear the sound and no one will know where you are coming from and where you are going.<sup>iv</sup>

If you hear his call, the call to do outrageous things, you are not alone. As a witness you will have:

### Jesus in agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus was about to die and he knew it. It's why he had come. BUT the burden was too heavy, so heavy as he prayed he was sweating drops of blood (a condition called [hematidrosis](#)). He said: "*Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*"

The burden was indeed so heavy that an angel had to come to strengthen the son of God! Having been strengthened in great courage he finally went to the cross willingly and humbly for like a lamb led to the slaughterhouse – he did not say a word.<sup>vi</sup>

### Paul's numerous sufferings.

The Apostle Paul really had resilience, despite immense physical suffering, he did not give up on Christ as he narrated<sup>vii</sup>:

- five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one;
- three times I was beaten with rods;
- once I was stoned;
- three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea;
- In my frequent journeys, I have been in danger from rivers and from bandits;
- in danger from my countrymen and from the Gentiles;
- in danger in the city and in the country;
- in danger on the sea and among false brothers;
- in labor and toil and often without sleep, in hunger and thirst and often without food, in cold and exposure.

### God's other generals of old

- **Abraham tested.** Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering. God only stopped Abraham at the last minute as the knife was about to fall!<sup>viii</sup> Abraham had the courage to believe that God was going to resurrect Isaac, for it was after all through Isaac that God had promised him many descendants.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Hosea marries a prostitute.** The First time that God spoke to Hosea, it wasn't something pleasant, a message of courage for example "Greetings Mighty Hero, the Lord is with you!"<sup>x</sup> No – it was a message that required extreme faith – trusting in this God who was calling him to do something CRAZY: "*Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be*

*conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshiping other gods.”<sup>xi</sup>*

Hosea must have reasoned that God would turn shame into no shame – perhaps he foresaw that God could in his mercy even redeem a prostitute, saying to her – “I don’t condemn you, go and sin no more.”<sup>xii</sup>

- **Isaiah walks around naked – for 3 years.** God gave Isaiah the privilege of seeing a vision of God enthroned in Heaven with the heavenly creatures who never stop calling “Holy, Holy Holy”. The same privilege carried with it a burden, a responsibility.

For 3 years Isaiah walked around naked and barefoot - as a sign to Egypt and Ethiopia. <sup>xiii</sup>

- **Ezekiel sleeps on specific sides for 430 days.** Many of us sleep like kings in our beds but Ezekiel wasn’t free to sleep in his bed any way he wanted. For a period of time he had to sleep as God commanded. First for 390 days (that is one year and 25 days) he slept on his left side. Then for 40 days (one month and 10 days) he had to sleep on his right side.

During this period God told him – you are bearing the sins of Israel (390 days) and Judah (40 days). Each day representing a year. <sup>xiv</sup> What a burden to carry!

- **Aaron isn’t allowed to mourn his sons.** Aaron’s two sons (Nadab and Abihu) had just been “killed” by God (for offering an unholy fire) but as if to make it worse, God commanded him and his remaining two sons (through Moses):

*“Do not show grief by leaving your hair uncombed or by tearing your clothes. If you do, you will die, and the LORD’s anger will strike the whole community of Israel. However, the rest of the Israelites, your relatives, may mourn because of the LORD’s fiery destruction of Nadab and Abihu.”<sup>xv</sup>*

## .... Our generation today

As we are surrounded by a cloud of great witnesses <sup>xvi</sup>– God’s generals who have gone before us, how shall we run our own race? The trick to knowing how to run with courage, even in the face of the shame or the challenges of following God in our generation where being Christian is “old fashioned” or plain “dumb” is to follow Jesus’ example. He did it this way:

*“Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”<sup>xvii</sup>*

For those Christians who endure the shame, the scorn, the hard times that come with being a Christian – God will not be ashamed to be their God and he has prepared a city for them, <sup>xviii</sup> infact the Spirit gives this as an example of your hope:

*“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.”<sup>xix</sup>*

## Your turn

So, what courageous thing do you need today? Is it:

- To take up your cross to follow Jesus, scorning the shame?
- Not being ashamed of his name and declaring it to men?
- Something the King has asked you to do but it appears crazy? Silly? Risky? Take heart – his generals walked the same path as you so Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 10: 37 (NIV)

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from Luke 9: 26

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from Matthew 25: 21 (NIV)

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted from John 3: 8

<sup>v</sup> Luke 22: 43

<sup>vi</sup> Isaiah 53: 7

<sup>vii</sup> 2 Corinthians 11: 24 – 27

<sup>viii</sup> Genesis 22

<sup>ix</sup> Hebrews 11: 19

<sup>x</sup> Adapted from Judges 6: 12 (NLT)

<sup>xi</sup> Hosea 1: 2 (NLT)

<sup>xii</sup> Adapted from Jesus' message to a woman caught in adultery as told in John 8: 11

<sup>xiii</sup> See Isaiah 20: 2 - 4

<sup>xiv</sup> Ezekiel 4: 1 – 6

<sup>xv</sup> Leviticus 10: 6 (NLT)

<sup>xvi</sup> Adapted from Hebrews 12

<sup>xvii</sup> Hebrews 12:2

<sup>xviii</sup> Adapted from Hebrews 11: 16

<sup>xix</sup> Revelation 3: 4-5 (NIV)