

Aug 16

SUCCESS IS ASSURED!  
SEVENTH IN SERIES ON "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA  
ROMANS 8:31-19  
AUGUST 16, 1987

Page 1

Today we fly! We take off and soar above the clouds, beyond the darkness; dancing in the air, swooping, gliding, defying the law of gravity. Nothing can hold us down. Great things are happening. Some days we get bogged down in the trivial. Some days we get hemmed in; confined by structures, rules, and procedures. Some days we get stuck in the mud of pettiness and smallness. Some days we get discouraged by setbacks, failures, and slow progress. Some days we get overwhelmed by the negative forces--the criticisms, complaints, and all the reasons why it won't work. Some days we crawl, rather than walk. Some days we creep rather than fly. But not today! Today we fly!

Today we celebrate victory. We soar with Paul in the magnificence of Romans 8:31-39. Paul really let himself go in this passage. He pulled out all the stops. He let the organ loose. Nothing can defeat you. Nothing can hold you back. Nothing can discourage you. Nothing can hamper, hinder, harass, or inhibit you. Paul asked, "If God is for us, who is against us?" Who is against you? You might name them, but they have no power. You can list your problems. You can itemize your troubles. You can enumerate all the reasons why you may fail. But none of them have power. None of them. If God is for you, who is against you? God will conquer, and furthermore, you will conquer with him. Success is assured!

We've been talking these several weeks about the human situation, the condition under which we all live, where the world is controlled by the power of sin and death. Today we celebrate the WAY OUT! God has provided the way out. The Holy Spirit not only leads the way, but provides the power. And in our passage today Paul eloquently, poetically, practically sings his hope and confidence. Today we fly because success is assured.

We live in a fascinating time. Two weeks ago I quoted Bishop Stanley Downes of India, who was with us for ten days, in which he stated there is an increasing interest throughout the world in spiritual matters. For example, this weekend a half-billion people are in prayer and meditation seeking Harmonic Convergence. Millions are gathering together in sunrise services, festivals, concerts, and parades to "facilitate a leap in consciousness making individual expansion, social harmony and world peace possible." "Dance Awake the Dream" is the theme. As Mt. Shasta is considered one of the eight sacred mountains of the world, thousands are converging on the mountain, making law enforcement officials nervous!

There are several reasons why this weekend is so special to these believers. First, all of the nine planets are in alignment forming two triangles, with seven of the planets in a fire sign of the zodiac. This formation, according to those who believe in astrology, will have incredible electromagnetic effect on the earth. Second, this weekend was prophesied by the ancient Mayans of Central America. According to the Mayans, civilization on this planet will peak today and tomorrow. A new energy and a new momentum will carry us to the year 2012 when there will be a major synchronization of our solar system with six other systems. A third reason is a similar prophecy of the Hopi Indians. In the Hopi prophecy we pass from the Fourth World to the Fifth World on August 16-17. These ancient peoples prophesied a major shift in universal harmony, balance and love.

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Page 2

Aren't these fascinating times? Even though we Christians do not share the belief in the power of the planets, nor have the Mayan and Hopi prophecies part of our theological system, we can rejoice that more people are becoming concerned for world harmony. We can certainly join them in prayer for harmony, balance and love. We can certainly feel a kinship with people concerned about our earth, its well being, and its preservation. I believe in the power of prayer and the good that can come from the combined energies of millions of people focusing their energy on peace, harmony and love.

And we Christians can witness to them that future success is assured. This earth will be changed into the holy city. This earth will be changed into the kingdom of God where God, not sin and death, will reign. This earth will come to fullness in love, harmony and peace. This earth ultimately will be a place where everyone has enough to eat, a place to sleep, and opportunities to develop their humanity. That is our hope, and Paul assures us that success is assured.

Why? Not because we deserve it; not because we are so good and pure; not because of our devotion; but because of the coming of God's reign, the kingdom of God. Have you realized in this sermon series the forward focus of our faith? The dynamism you need to live your life to the fullest does not come from some remembered cherished event. The dynamism does not really come from within you either. The dynamism comes from "pressing on toward the goal," which is Paul's phrase. We look to the future for our direction. We look to the future for our goals. We look to the future for our power. We are forward looking; trusting in the final glory. Your best days are ahead. The best days of this church are yet to come. The best days of our civilization are yet to come.

Christ is in front of you. Michel Bouttier in his book, Christianity According to Paul, suggests an image to help us understand the human dilemma and the way out. Life is like a mountain climb. The "Way Out" of sin and death to life, joy, peace, the Kingdom of God, is an inaccessible summit, an unconquered rock face, like the face of El Capitan in Yosemite. How to reach the top is the human quest. In Paul's day, the Greek answer was to philosophize, to understand the quest, to gain knowledge, and through the mystery religions, gain the secret knowledge that would allow the believers to understand and conquer. The Jewish answer was legalism. By structuring laws and obeying ethical and cultic laws, they believed they could conquer the cliff by laying one law upon another and ascending.

Modern America has several solutions. One is technology. Through engineering, management systems, manufacturing, and consumer consumption, we expect to conquer the mountain. Others today feel they can conquer the mountain through spiritual exercises. Through meditation, they hope to free the soul from the body and through out-of-the-body experiences ascend the cliff, essentially leaving the physical body behind. And then there are those in America today who look at the forbidding cliff and the seemingly impossible climb, sit back, open a can of beer or smoke a joint, and ask, "What mountain?"

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Page 3

The Christian solution is quite another matter. The way out or the way up the unconquered rock face has been provided by God who sent Jesus to carry out a first performance. Jesus conquered the mountain. He was thought to be irretrievably lost, condemned to death, nailed to a cross, but now he appears on high, alive. Jesus leads the way for each of us. This doesn't mean that Jesus has made your climb, or died your death, or substituted for your judgment, so that nothing is expected of you, as if you are hoisted up the cliff in a basket. No, you do your own climbing, but Jesus is ahead of you, guiding you. He calls down, "Put your foot in that crevice." "Grab that rock with your hand." He encourages you, "Don't be afraid. You can do it." As you watch for the next hold, you can see the sky above. You can see the top of the cliff. Victory is in sight, but you still must climb, one step at a time.

Jesus also calls out warnings. "Watch your next foothold. Don't put your foot there, the rock is loose. Don't hang on to that bush, it might pull out. Don't look down. Don't look back, or you'll get dizzy and scare yourself. Hold your head up. Keep your eyes on the next move."

Sometimes there is a ledge and you can rest. Oh, how good it feels to stretch out, rest, and enjoy the view. When you are resting on a ledge, then you can look down. You can look back at your life and reflect. Then you open your thermos and drink some ice water or hot tea. Then you have a sandwich and enjoy the break. Of course, you can't remain on the ledge forever. Some folks reach a comfortable spot in their lives; they reach a ledge, and they want to stay there forever. They get complacent and satisfied. But what happens when you stay on a plateau too long? You get bored, and begin looking for excitement in the wrong places. The excitement you need in your life is not on the ledge with other resters, but in the climb. Resume the climb. Get going up the cliff. Set your sights again on the top of the cliff, on the conquest.

Sometimes the climb is not pleasant. The sun gets hot and burns your skin. You get thirsty. Sometimes it rains. The wind blows and it's a cold wind, perhaps even ice and hail. The higher you get the more severe is the weather, the more severe is the testing. But on the nice days, the higher you get, the cleaner the air. You are above the smog, above the noise of traffic on the freeways; you're above the exhaust fumes. There are times when every muscle hurts, when the next ledge is seemingly unattainable. You hurt, agonize, and wonder where your next strength is going to come from. But Jesus hollers encouragement, "Just a little further. You'll make it."

If you miss a hold, if your hand slips, if your foot slips, and you begin to fall, lo and behold, you discover that you are on a rope. You are tied to Jesus by a rope. Yes, you may slip. Yes, you may fall, but not to the bottom to your death, but only to the end of the rope. There you are held in mid-air. There you float. There you fly. And you bounce back to the cliff, and begin again; back a few feet from where you fell, yes, but not to the starting point, not back to the bottom, just a few feet.

Victory is assured. Success is assured because Paul tells us the rope that attaches you to Jesus will never break. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In fact, Paul says, "Nothing in all

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creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39) Paul lists some enemies which terrified the people of his day, enemies who now have no power to sever the rope: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword. They cannot separate you from the love of Christ.

Angels have no power. The Jews had a highly developed scenario of angels at this time, some of whom assaulted humans and tried to prevent humans from becoming too angelic. Paul said not even angels can sever the rope by which Jesus holds you. Paul spoke of height and depth, which were astrological terms. The ancient world had a strong belief in astrology, and many believed the world was haunted by the tyranny of the stars. But Paul says not even "height," when a star is its zenith; nor "depth," when a star is at its lowest influence, can affect you. No, not even principalities, which referred to powers, energies and forces beyond the control of people, can sever the rope. Not even things present nor things to come; not even death can separate you.

Sisters and brothers, today we fly. Today we soar in the magnificence of Paul's poetry and imagery. Trust in God for the future. Trust God with your life. Climb life's seemingly insurmountable cliff with Jesus in front, leading you, guiding you, confidently tied together by a rope. Climb, for victory is certain. Success is assured. Why are we confident? Because, "nothing in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."