



We have learned that Jesus was an unlikely hero in his humanity. He overcame his disadvantages as human being because He was the Son of God.

Those of us who have believed upon Jesus can also become unlikely hero's despite our humanity because the Son of God dwells in us.

Last week, we learned that even a woman of ill repute can become an unlikely hero in the Kingdom of God if she knows and believes in Jesus.

This morning I want to talk to you about another unlikely hero of Christianity. His name was Paul. We have much to learn from the life of Paul.

Why should we consider Paul an unlikely hero of Christianity?

Before Paul was converted...

- Paul was an enemy of the church of Jesus. He not only did not believe in Jesus, but he persecuted those who did. He considered Christians to be dangerous heretics and a threat to his way of life. He was commissioned by the Sanhedrin to arrest Christians. He even agreed with the execution of Christians that were the most serious threat to His beliefs. He was the last person the disciples of Jesus would expect to represent Christ. Before he converted, he was a mortal enemy of the church of Jesus.

After Paul was converted....

- Paul was an unlikely hero of faith because of his family heritage. He was educated by Gamaliel, a Jewish rabbi who trained his disciples to become a part of one of the most legalistic Jewish sects, the Pharisees. The fact that his family supported his education tells us a lot about his family.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because of the questions the disciples of Jesus about his integrity.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because he was a serious threat to other religions. He was in constant danger.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because he was Jew and his mission field was gentiles.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because of his physical stature. Paul was small in stature.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because he was not a gifted preacher.
- Paul was an unlikely hero because he was single.



Despite these obstacles and disadvantages, Paul became the greatest Christian missionary who has ever lived. He went on four missionary journeys. He wrote 13 epistles for our bible. He laid a significant part of the foundation of the church of Jesus that would become the largest religious movement in the history of the world. All of us that are building up the church today are building on the foundation laid by Paul.

How did He do it?

We could spend this whole series talking about Paul and what made Paul a hero of faith.

- His knowledge of the Old Testament and his ability to prove that Jesus was the messiah from Old Testament prophecies.
- His gift to be an apostle and the supernatural ability he was given to perform signs and wonders.
- His work ethic.
His tireless efforts to disciple people. He said he worked day and night to disciple others.

But I want to focus on one story this morning that reveals more than any other reason why Paul became a hero of our faith.



Acts 21:1-14

1 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. 4 And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. 5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. 6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. 7 And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. 8 On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" 12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?"

For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

NKJV

We know from the writings of the early church fathers, Paul did die for the name of the Lord Jesus. He was beheaded by Nero in Rome in 64AD during a terrible time of persecution of Christians.

To die for the name of the Lord Jesus meant that Paul was willing to obey Jesus even if it cost him his life.

But notice that Paul did not say that he was just willing to die for obeying Jesus. He said that he was ready to die.

The word ready is the Greek word...

hetoimos (het-oy'-mos); the word is from an old noun heteos (fitness); adjusted, i.e. ready:

KJV - prepared, (made) ready (-iness, to our hand).

Being willing can be a more passive subjection to something you may not prefer unless it is necessary.

Being ready reveals something that you have prepared yourself to experience. You are not just willing to suffer for your obedience to Jesus, you expect it to happen. You have accepted it and prepared yourself for it. You even hope that it will happen. You have a death wish for the glory of God. You can see that your death could accomplish more for God than your life. People that are not just willing but ready to die for the glory of Jesus exhibit extraordinary courage.

At some point in his spiritual journey, Paul had moved from just being willing to die for Jesus if it were necessary to accepting and hoping that it would happen. He considered it an honor. This settled that issue in his heart.

He demonstrated his readiness to die for Jesus on many occasions.

Here is the way Paul described his life.

2 Cor 11:22-28

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.

23 Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness —

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

NKJV

Paul became an unlikely hero of Christianity because...

Paul was ready to die for Jesus!

We do not know when Paul arrived at this place in his spiritual journey and settled this issue in his heart. It could have been right after his conversion to Christ. A man named Ananias was sent to him in Damascus to reveal to him these words from the Lord Jesus.

Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

NKJV

- Paul could have settled this in his heart before he preached his first sermon to the Jews there in Damascus that Jesus was the messiah.
- Paul could have settled this in his heart after he heard after that sermon that the Jews had hatched a plot to kill him.
- Paul could have settled this in his heart as he was being lowered to the ground in a basket from an upstairs window to escape that plot.
- Paul could have settled this in his heart during his 14 years of seclusion in Tarsus before he was sent out on his first missionary journey.

But at some point, after his conversion, Paul accepted he would die for obeying Jesus and he made himself ready for that moment.

If was not ready to die for Jesus, he would have never been an unlikely hero of the Christian faith.

Throughout bible history and church history, all the unlikely heroes of our faith settled this issue in their hearts. They were all ready to die to obey God.

- Abraham came to a place where he was ready to offer up his own son.
- Jacob returned to the promised land to face his brother Esau.
- Moses returned to Egypt to face Pharaoh.
- David challenged Goliath as a teenager.
- Esther said if I perish, I perish.

Whether the cause was right or wrong, good, or evil, no great cause has ever advanced without the followers of that cause being ready to die for it.

This is certainly true in the history of our nation. From Christopher Columbus to the Pilgrims to our founding fathers to those who fought in the Revolutionary War to Harriett Tubman to Abraham Lincoln to those heroes who died in the civil war to those who fought in World War 1 to those who fought in World War 2 to those who fought in Korea to those who fought for civil rights to those who fought in Vietnam to those who fought for our freedom from terrorism to those who fight today.

Right or wrong, good, or evil, no cause has ever advanced without the followers of that cause being ready to die for it.

For every Christian that has ever become an unlikely hero of faith like Paul, there is a crisis of faith. In that crisis of faith, unlikely heroes of faith accept death as Paul did. They then prepare themselves to die for their faith.

Right now, because of this virus, Christians are experiencing a great crisis of faith. We are called and commanded by Jesus to make disciples. (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 28:18-20) To obey Jesus, we must go be with people outside of our family. To go be with other people, we must risk our physical well-being.

Our federal, state, and local civil authorities consider the risk to be so great that at one time in Oklahoma they issued shelter in place orders except for essential businesses.

The Oklahoma City Public Schools just recently announced that they will start the new school year online.

Our mayor has issued a mandate on masks for most public places.

Many of our senior members of our church have told me that their children have urged them to shelter in place.

These circumstances have created a crisis of faith for many Christians.

What you are doing online or on the phone to encourage other believers and be encouraged is great. Please continue. But if this were the most effective way to reach people with the gospel and disciple people, Jesus would have modeled it for us.

What should you do?

You should do what Paul did. You should make yourself ready to die for the cause of Jesus Christ!

In the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918, one third of the world's population was infected with the virus. 675,000 people died in our nation. Hospitals were overwhelmed. During that pandemic, many churches suspended their services for a season. But the church of Jesus Christ all over the world was on the front lines ministering to the sick. Thousands of Christians risked their lives to obey Jesus and minister to the sick. They took what limited measures they had to protect themselves based on the science they had available and followed Jesus.



Because hospitals were overwhelmed, many churches opened their buildings to care for the sick and many Christians volunteered to serve the sick in those buildings.

It did cost some Christians their lives.

For example, a Christian publication called the *Gospel Advocate* reported this.

["J. D. Northcut, an evangelist from Tracy City, Tennessee, fell ill with influenza followed by pneumonia and died at the age of 43. He had given almost continual attention to sufferers near him."](#)

God is wanting to use this current crisis of our faith to cause Christians across our nation to answer this question, "am I ready to die to obey Jesus?"

If you make yourself ready to die for Jesus, the Holy Spirit will guide your daily decisions.

If you are not ready to die for obeying Jesus, you will be guided by fear.

The Lord is using this current crisis to prepare His church for our future; when it is no longer safe to preach the whole counsel of God's Word; when it is no longer safe to assemble publicly in our buildings; when it is no longer safe to be associated with those who preach the whole counsel of God's Word.

Like Paul, are you ready to die for Jesus?

Being ready to die for Jesus will cause you to experience peace amid storms, power in the face of adversity, and promise for any loss.

Are you ready to die for Jesus?

If you say I think I am ready, I hope I am ready, I want to be ready, then you are not ready.

Ask the Lord right now to do a work in your heart so that you can honestly stand with Paul and say to your loved ones....

13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?
For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The next generation is watching you parents. The next generation is watching you grandparents.

Are you ready to die for Jesus?

There is not a greater legacy you can leave them or leave your church.

"Is the distinction between living for Christ and dying for Him so great? Is not the second the logical conclusion of the first?"

Jim Elliot, missionary who died a martyr in Ecuador on January 8, 1956

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Jim Elliot