

THE TRAGEDY OF ALMOST

In his letter to the young evangelist Timothy, the apostle Paul described these times we are living in today as “perilous times” (2 Timothy 3:1).

And all we have to do is take a look at what’s happening all around us to see that what he described is 100% accurate.

Rampant crime and heinous acts of violence. Immorality. A breakdown of authority. War. Calamities and natural disasters. The list keeps piling up.

Despite the best intentions of man, the only way these mountainous problems can be solved is the return of Jesus Christ. And He will come. That day is fast approaching.

As true followers of Jesus Christ, our responsibility then is to remain steadfast, holding firmly to the hope of our faith without wavering (Hebrews 10:25). And the only way we will succeed is to endure, persevere and hold fast to the truth of God all the way to the end (Matthew 24:13; Philippians 3:11-14).

The Bible contains a story where the goal of the Israelites was nearly within their reach. But ultimately they allowed success to slip away from their grasp.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers chapter 13, the Israelites were camped at the very doorstep of the promised land.

Their long and arduous journey from Egypt was almost at an end. They had reached their destination. They were almost there.

So God tells Moses to send out 12 men to explore the promised land of Canaan, return to the campsite and report their findings to all of the people (Numbers 13:1-2).

After 40 days, all 12 returned to the camp.

Ten scouts reported, “The land is truly that land of milk and honey. Just as God had promised it would be. But, there is no way we will be able to subdue the people of that land. They’re much too big and much too strong. We don’t stand a chance (Numbers 13:26-28).

But Caleb and Joshua believed that with God's help, they could overpower their enemies. No matter how big and strong they were (Numbers 14:6-9). However, the people chose to believe the other 10 scouts.

They shrieked at Moses and Aaron. "It would have been better if we had stayed in Egypt instead of dying out here in this wilderness! Let's appoint another leader and head on back to Egypt" (Numbers 14:2-4).

Because of their lack of faith, God sentenced the Israelites to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, where those 20 years old and up perished (Numbers 14:28-35). They did not enter the promised land. They were ALMOST there. At the very doorstep. But they did not make it.

Their example teaches us the vital lesson of the tragedy of ALMOST. We don't have to be victims of the tragedy of almost like those Israelites were, IF we develop and cultivate TWO essential characteristics.

The first is perseverance.

The quality of perseverance is evident in that individual who sets his resolve with dogged tenacity and determination then says "I will not quit" despite all the handicaps, barriers and obstructions!

The man Nehemiah stands as a testament to perseverance.

Appointed governor of Jerusalem, Nehemiah personally saw the dilapidated condition of the city's walls. Despite constant harassment, intimidating threats against him personally as well as the families of the workers, Nehemiah persisted (Nehemiah 4:7-9, 14).

And after 52 days, the walls of the city were finished (Nehemiah 6:15). Jerusalem was secure from all of its enemies round about.

Strength of will and personality, infectious optimism are qualities we all admire and should emulate.

During times of adversity, as steadfast, tenacious, determined followers of Jesus Christ, we refuse to faint in the face of hardship and adversity (Proverbs 24:10).

When things don't turn out as we expect, we are not confounded nor weakened by fear. Rather, we stand our ground. We do not budge. We refuse to be bullied and intimidated.

The second characteristic that prevents us from falling into this tragedy of almost is courage.

Courage is the opposite of FEAR. It involves acting against that fear.

True Christians are as bold as lions (Proverbs 28:1).

Today, individuals who defy and disobey the law are regarded as brave and daring. In reality the opposite is true!

It requires MORE strength and GREATER courage to stand firm and do what is right in God's sight. It is so much easier and safer to go along to get along!

David, that young shepherd boy and future king of Israel, had the boldness and the courage to charge towards the giant Goliath.

"I'm not the least bit afraid of you," he told Goliath, "because I come in the name of the Great God Almighty whom you have defied and dishonored. He will deliver you into my hand" (1 Samuel 17:45-46).

Just as He gave David the victory over Goliath, realize that God Himself stands ready to deliver us from whatever seemingly insurmountable, overwhelming trial or problem we face.

Jesus Christ is telling us "Come to Me, and I'll help you carry that load and give you rest. I've got big, broad shoulders. I can take care of that for you. I can give you relief! I want to give you peace of mind, free from all worry and anxiety. My yoke is easy, helpful and useful. And my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

But, the majority of people today are convinced that God's yoke is burdensome and hard. They prefer being yoked to this world because it appears bright and cheerful and lots of fun. But when the fun is over and the music stops playing and the whiskey stops flowing, then here comes the kickback: heartache, pain and frustration.

So Christ is saying, “Yield and obey Me. Follow Me, I know the way. This is the way, so walk you in it. And it will lead you to satisfaction, contentment, fulness of joy and the true peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

We don't want to end up like the Israelites did. They were at the very threshold of the promised land. They were ALMOST there. But they did not make it. They became casualties of the tragedy of ALMOST.

And so, we must develop those qualities of perseverance and courage. Patiently continue in doing the right thing. And, we're going to be headed in the right direction. And we're going to end up in the right place each and every time.

If we persevere and endure, if we boldly and courageously stand for God's truth and His way of life despite the intense pressure to give in, we will not miss out.

We will not lose out.

We will enter into our promised land — the glorious Kingdom of God — and we will not end up a victim of the tragedy of ALMOST.