

“Chase the Lion!”

2 Samuel 23:13-17 ¹

Now, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Last week’s awful fire in London reminded me of a phrase that has been often used by first responders at least since 911—“We run in while others run out.” So I was interested to see a news report this week describing a similar event in Iraq on June 1.

Dave Eubank is a former Army Ranger and the founder of the *Free Burma Rangers*, a humanitarian group that actually does work mostly in Burma/Myanmar. Dave was in Iraq helping civilians escape from ISIS-held areas, and he got a call from an Iraqi unit on the frontlines west of Mosul, reporting that civilians were fleeing the city and being gunned down by ISIS.

At least fifty people had been killed by the time Dave got to the scene. Suddenly, he saw movement among the bodies, but that movement was 150 yards away across a killing field. Dave prayed with his colleagues and called for American air cover and smoke canisters to hide him while he ran across that field to attempt a rescue.

As he ran across the smoky field under fierce cross-fire, Dave continued to pray, knowing that he was not likely to survive the effort. By God’s grace, he was able to rescue a young girl on that run, and he was able to rescue seven more people the next day.²

What Dave Eubank did was quite like what King David’s three warriors did in our text this morning. David was at war with the Philistines, and the Philistines held Bethlehem, like ISIS held Mosul. Bethlehem, of course, was David’s hometown. In a moment of frustration and thirst, he exclaimed, “*Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!*” (2 Samuel 23:13-17).

David had an elite corps of thirty mighty warriors, and three of these men heard David make this exclamation. They daringly broke through the Philistine lines, went to the well, and brought him the water he longed for—like running into Mosul for some local falafel or something. David was grateful, of course, but he refused to drink the water, saying, “*Is this not the blood of men who risked their lives?*” (2 Samuel 23:17).

Second Samuel 23 gives the names of the thirty mighty warriors, but it isn’t clear which three went for the water.³ There’s a fascinating note a few verses down about a named hero, though. Here’s what it says:

*“Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab’s two mightiest warriors. **He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion**”* (2 Samuel 23:20).

Mark Batterson, pastor of National Community Church on Capitol Hill, and author of more than a dozen books worth reading, has written two books inspired by that verse: *In a Pit*

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on June 18, 2017, Father’s Day.

² <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2017/june/amazing-rescue-ex-us-soldier-says-god-opened-a-way-to-save-girl-trapped-by-isis>

³ And tellingly, among the Thirty was Uriah the Hittite, whom David later had murdered.

with a Lion on a Snowy Day, and *Chase the Lion*.⁴ Mark's books always inspire me, and one line in *Chase the Lion* caught my attention: **"Are you living your life in a way that is worth telling stories about?"** That line reminded me of a scene from *The Two Towers*, the second movie in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

As some of you know, the general plot of Tolkien's tales has to do with the future of peace in an ancient fictional realm known as Middle-Earth. This peace is dependent upon the destruction of a powerful ring that has been entrusted to a little hobbit named Frodo Baggins. The ring, forged by the evil Lord Sauron, and filled with all his power and malice, slowly and inexorably corrupts its wearer to do his will.

Middle Earth has been plunged into Sauron's war of conquest, and the only way of conquering Sauron and his savage army is the perilous quest of taking the ring back into the enemy's own land and casting it back into the fires of Mount Doom, where it was forged. As Mount Doom becomes visible in the distance, Frodo and his faithful squire, Sam, are famished and exhausted, and Frodo shows more and more of the strain of bearing the ring.

"I can't do this, Sam."

"I know, Mr. Frodo. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are.

"It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo—the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end, because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?"

"But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer.

"Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. **Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back—only they didn't, because they were holding on to something.**"

"What are we holding on to, Sam?"

"That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for."⁵

"The great stories." "The stories that stayed with you." "The stories that really mattered." "The stories that meant something." So on this Father's Day morning, I ask you, guys, "Are you living your life in a way that is worth telling about?"

I don't know that any research backs this up, but I've heard the opinion expressed that many men are addicted to sports because watching sports provides the greatest adventure they ever experience. If there's any truth to that idea, it describes life lived at second-hand at best, and such stories are not really worth telling, at least not for long.

Are you living your dream, guys? Are you living a story that will be worth telling about?

⁴ Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day: How to Survive and Thrive when Opportunity Roars* (Multnomah, 2016); *Chase the Lion: If Your Dream Doesn't Scare You, It's Too Small* (Multnomah, 2016). Many of the more memorable sentences in this sermon were inspired by or taken from *Chase the Lion*.

⁵ *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (New Line Cinema, 2002), based on the novel by J. R. R. Tolkien (New York: Ballantine, 1965), directed by Peter Jackson.

English novelist Graham Greene, one of the greatest authors of the twentieth century, once wrote that “There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”⁶ Are you living that future, that dream? And if not, why not?

The Bible tells us that “*We are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). God has a purpose for your life, and your birth was God’s opening move. What have you done since then?

One of Jesus’ points in what we call “The Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25:14-30) is that the faithfulness God desires is not defined by “not losing ground” but by “taking new ground.”⁷ God’s purpose is to bring this entire planet—and with this planet, the entire cosmos itself—under God’s sovereign blessing and care. You and I have been commissioned to help that happen (Matthew 28:18-20).

I’m afraid that most of us tend to set our sights too low—and I include myself in that. Being “prudent” and “holding the fort” are not likely to get us where God wants us to be. We so easily settle for “making a living,” when God’s purpose is that we “make a Life.” More than that, God’s purpose is for us to change the world. Our charge is to take back those lives claimed by the powers of Darkness and bring them into the Kingdom of Light.

Our faith isn’t illogical. It’s *theological*. We need to remember that a God-sized dream or purpose is, by definition, much larger than we are. Do you remember the benediction we used every week during our “40-Day Journey” last year? Here it is:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Would you say that with me? ***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!***

Friends, what God is up to is not only “immeasurably more” than anything we *have* imagined. It is immeasurably more than anything we *can* imagine. God is writing a Story Worth Telling, and we are part of the cast!

So how can you find your place in the Story? Well, while material prosperity is a good thing, that’s not the way to the Story. While intellectual achievement is a good thing, that’s not the way to the Story. While deep wisdom is a good thing, that’s not the way to the Story, either.

Here’s what God says about the Way to the Story: *This is what the LORD says – The wise person should not boast in his wisdom; the strong should not boast in his strength; the wealthy should not boast in his wealth. **But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me – that I am the LORD, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things*** (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

I’ve told you before—even last week, I think—that there are few things in life more disappointing than climbing to “the top of the ladder” only to discover that we have leaned it against the wrong wall. Watch yourself! Don’t let the world’s values determine your trajectory.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Greene

⁷ Although holding what you have in the face of opposition is also biblical (Ephesians 6:10-13; Revelation 3:11).

The Bible tells us, “*Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12:2).

As you think about that, remember that our Enemy intends to steal your joy, to kill your dreams, and to destroy your life. And the powers of Darkness are at work 24/7/365 in order to accomplish that. But the plan Jesus has for you is that you might have an abundant, purposeful, consistently joyful life. Which would you rather have?

Guys, if you want to live a life worth living in a Story Worth Telling, you’ve got to get out of your comfort zone. Faith takes the first step before God reveals the second step. If you want to see miraculous things, you’ve got to attempt a dream that is beyond your own resources.

So here’s the deal. If you’re going to get out of a boat in the middle of the ocean, you’d better make real sure that Jesus has actually said, “Come.” But if Jesus says, “Come,” you’d better not stay in the boat. And with that first step of obedience, the engines of Heaven begin to move.

What was that ancient dream that once stirred your soul—and would still stir your soul today, if you let yourself hear its song? What has God uniquely gifted, called, and positioned you to do? Pastor Tim introduced me to a young man this week whom God has given a vision to put small lending libraries in villages all over his homeland, the island of Jamaica. That’s a God-sized vision.

One theme that Mark Batterson repeats a lot in *Chase the Lion* is the idea that “**If your dream doesn’t scare you, it’s too small.**” I’ve been thinking about that general idea for a while, now. I’m old enough to understand what Hezekiah thought after Isaiah announced that God’s judgment upon the nation would come after his own death: “*Well, at least there will be peace and security in my lifetime*” (Isaiah 39:8b). Many of us in this room are old enough to understand that, too.

It’s challenging to stay engaged with world-changing dreams when we’re on the back side of the “normal curve,” but that’s what God calls us to do. Back during the long bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama that began the Civil Rights Movement (the boycott actually began on my fifth birthday), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to an old woman who was participating in the boycott: “Mama, why are you walking like this, walking miles and miles to work? You’re not going to benefit much from this new situation yourself.” And she said, “Dr. King, I’m not doing this for myself. *I’m doing this for my grandchildren.*”⁸

I don’t know about you, but I need to keep reminding myself that what we do today and in our lives isn’t so much for ourselves as for the generations that come after us . . . until Jesus comes. On December 31, 1759, Arthur Guinness opened a brewery in Dublin, Ireland, leasing property at St. James’ Gate—and yes, it’s his name that’s on the *Guinness Book of World Records*, though that came long after him.

I haven’t checked, but Arthur is probably in the book himself, because when he leased that property, he prevailed upon the authorities to give him a nine-thousand-year lease. That’s right—9,000 years! That’s thinking about the generations that follow us! And we who follow Jesus ought to do better than a bloke who built a brewery.

⁸ Vincent Harding, “In the Company of the Faithful: Journeying toward the Promised Land,” *Sojourners*, 14 (May 1985), 17.

Sometimes, following the dream God gives takes us into places that are as dangerous as being in a snowy pit with a lion. I told you recently of Karen Watson's martyrdom in Mosul a few years ago. Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, Jim Elliott, and Peter Fleming were martyred by the Auca Indians of Ecuador in 1956, and their deaths eventually led to nearly that entire tribe coming to know Jesus. J. W. Tucker was martyred in the Congo in 1964, and his death eventually led to thousands of the Mangbetu tribe coming to know Jesus.

We don't know what following the Dream may cost. But we do know that the Dream is worth what it costs. *"The Kingdom of Heaven," Jesus said, "is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it"* (Matthew 13:46).

Each of us has a God-given Dream that draws us forward into a Story Worth Telling, if we will listen to God's still, small Voice within and follow that Dream. That Dream is a Big, Holy, Audacious Goal (BHAG), as we noted last week.

And we as a congregation are listening for BHAGs, too. There are several things that feel to me as though they might be BHAGs on our horizon. Taken together, they sound a lot like witnessing *"in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). I don't yet know whether these are from God, but I invite you to ponder them with me.

Our "Jerusalem" is Oakland Mills. We are making progress in engaging our neighborhood with the love of Jesus. Pastor Neville got us started. Pastor Tim is keeping us focused. And we are praying toward that new Pastor who will take us farther still.

It's crucial that we make a significant difference for God's Kingdom right where we are; and my mind keeps going back to that empty space next to Weis that could become a neighborhood center where CBF will help to transform Oakland Mills.

Our "Judea and Samaria" is the Baltimore region, and we are helping to support two new churches in that region: the *Fire & Light Church*, with Pastor Mark Swan, in Reisterstown, and the *Tribe Church*, with Pastor Tim Mull, in PG County.

My heart increasingly feels that we should lean in in a major way to support these two congregations and their pastoral families. I'm not sure what that would look like, but I'm praying and talking with both of them to get a sense of what God wants us to do.

Our "ends of the earth" happen to be right here in Columbia, I think. Columbia is a very international place, and even with all of our warts, the United States remains a nation in which millions in our world aspire to live.

It seems to me that CBF should partner with appropriate organizations to sponsor and resettle at least one refugee family at all times. When one family becomes self-supporting and self-sustaining, we should adopt another. Many of these families are likely to not yet know Jesus, and as we help them, we will love them toward our Lord.

Friends, we live in an age when truly amazing things are happening, and amazing things will continue to happen, both secular and sacred. I suspect that we need to repent of our small dreams and our small ideas of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).