

On With It!

Has God called you to go against the grain and swim against the tide? Has He called you to accomplish an impossible task? If so, this article is for you.

While in Israel leading a tour group last week, I was reminded again of the miracle of the modern Hebrew language, a language now spoken by little children in playgrounds after being used only in written, academic, or religious forms for almost 2,000 years.

How can a dead language come back to life? How can a language used for centuries only in Jewish halls of study and prayer become the daily language of a thriving nation?

When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda sensed a calling to revive the Hebrew language as a key to the restoration of his Jewish people to their ancient homeland, he was met with scorn and mockery, especially from religious Jews who felt he would be defiling the holy tongue.

And the odds were completely against him. Not only was the task unprecedented and seemingly impossible, but he was dying of tuberculosis and given only months to live, although still a young man.

The rest, as they say, is history—and what amazing history it is.

The blurb to Robert St. Johns' classic biography of Ben-Yehuda states, "The biography of Ben-Yehuda is the touching and inspiring story of a frail scholar burning with an inner fire, whose fanatical devotion to a single idea triumphed against overwhelming odds."

This reminds me of John Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce, written Feb. 24, 1791, just a few days before

Wesley's death at the age of 88.

Wilberforce, who had been converted through Wesley's ministry, was a member of Parliament, determined to put an end to slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire. This too was an impossible task. The slave trade had been a way of life for the Empire for centuries, deeply intertwined with the economy and affecting millions of people.

Wesley wrote, "Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum [Athanasius against the world], I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."

This one line speaks to every one of us called by God to do the impossible, whether that means ending legalized abortion on demand, turning the tide of homosexual activism, breaking the back of human trafficking, transforming the inner cities, or whatever the impossible task might be: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils."

In our own strength and wisdom we will fail. Count on it. The opposition is too intense and the spiritual and natural forces we are combatting too powerful.

But that is not bad news to me. Instead, it is good news, since we are not relying on our strength or wisdom or power or networking or funding or abilities. We are relying on God Himself. As Wesley wrote, "But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God?"

That's the perspective we must hold on to if we are to see victory and transformation come.

That's why Paul exhorted the Ephesians to "be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength" (Eph. 6:10). We are leaning on His strength, His might, His power, His wisdom, doing His will, not ours.

As I have reminded the Lord in prayer many times over the years, "Lord, this was Your idea, not mine! This is not something I dreamed up, nor is it a task that I created. I'm only seeking to do Your will!"

It was only after decades of frustration and defeat that Wilberforce saw victory come and again, as they say, the rest is history. Wilberforce was God's agent on the earth.

This was the perspective that empowered missionaries to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, overcoming impossible odds and facing down demonic strongholds that most of us could never imagine. And they often did it virtually alone, with limited funding, serving in the midst of hostile, foreign surroundings, not to mention battling through weakness and sickness and abandonment.

Yet their eyes were fixed on the one who said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18), and He was their source of hope and courage.

As William Carey, the man known as the father of modern missions, once wrote from India, "Now all my friends are but one; I rejoice, however, that He is all-sufficient, and can supply all my wants, spiritual and temporal."

To quote another missionary pioneer, J. Hudson Taylor, "We are a supernatural people; born again by a supernatural birth; we wage a supernatural fight and are taught by a supernatural teacher; led by a supernatural captain to assured victory."

In this world, we will have tribulation and battle and, often, insurmountable obstacles to overcome. Jesus Himself guaranteed it (see John 16:33). But He not only guaranteed that there would be pressure and difficulty and persecution in this world. He overcame the world, and in Him, we are overcomers too.

As John explained, “whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith” (1 John 5:4). That’s why Catherine Booth could say on her deathbed, “The waters are rising but so am I. I am not going under, but over.”

So remember Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (who didn’t even know our Messiah) and John Wesley and William Wilberforce. Remember the missionary pioneers and the world changers and the spiritual revolutionaries. And renew your confidence in the One who died and rose again, and put your entire hope in Him.

And then . . . go forward. On with it!

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