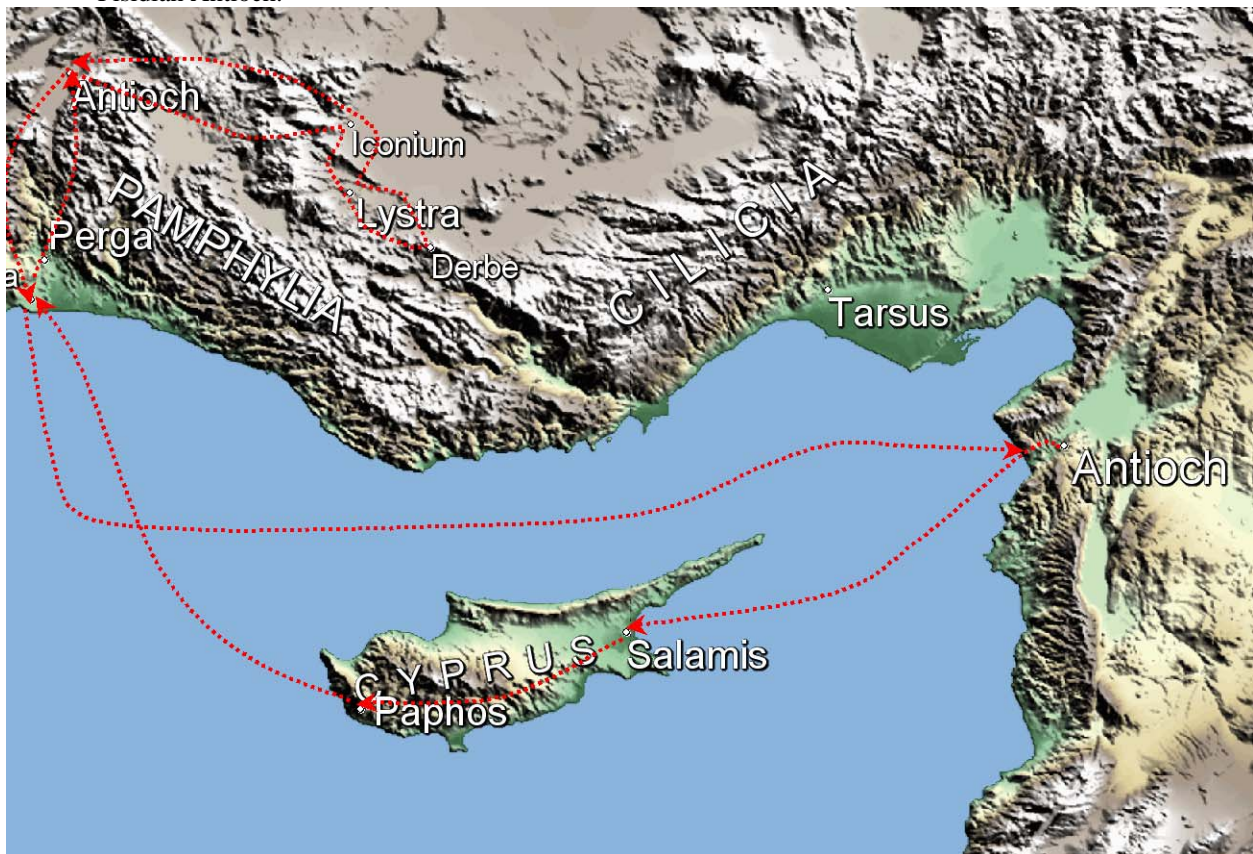


*THE GREATEST ADVENTURE*  
ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH  
ACTS 13:42-52

**BIG IDEA: WE CAN BE PART OF THE RESCUE MISSION OF THE AGES.**

INTRODUCTION:

- With our hearts in our throats--Merilee and I invited all our neighbors to a Bible-based marriage Bible study.<sup>1</sup> We were blown away when they almost all came. In the mix were two guys who came with their wives whom I voted most-likely-not-to-become-Christians. They all did their homework. Attendance was almost perfect thru the 8 weeks—even the session titled, *The Holy Spirit in Your Marriage*. At the end the group took up an offering and gave us a gift card to Home Depot. *Maybe our house looked like it needed some help!!!* One of the most-likely-not-to-become-a-Christian guys moved away with his family and we thought that was the last we'd ever hear of them. But we got a call one day and they invited us up to dinner at their new home. Over dinner they told us this heart-warming story of how that home study we did softened the husband's heart and he became a believer in Jesus. They were deeply involved in a local church, growing in the Lord, and the kids were part of the church youth group.
- Now you need to understand that Merilee and I are both pretty introverted. Sending out those invitations was really out of our comfort zone. On the Apostle Paul boldness-scale, we hardly register. But nevertheless we are in the game!
- We can *all* be in the game—God's great rescue mission of the ages.
- We did it 5 miles north of Monroe. Paul did it on the north side of the Mediterranean in a place called Pisidian Antioch.



<sup>1</sup> Family Life's *Homebuilders* small group resources, *Building Your Marriage*.

- And this is his adventure story...
- **Acts 13:42-52** As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. <sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear **the word of the Lord.** <sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. <sup>46</sup> Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak **the word of God** to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." [Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6] <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored **the word of the Lord;** and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> **The word of the Lord** spread through the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. <sup>51</sup> So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.
- Wow—quite an adventure! Far away and long ago. And yet—and yet--WE CAN BE PART OF THE RESCUE MISSION OF THE AGES.

## I. GOD IS THE GREAT **RESCUER**

A. It's His **Mission.** **Verse 44**, the word of the Lord. **Verse 46**, the word of God. **Verse 48**, the word of the Lord. **Verse 49**, the word of the Lord.

**NOTE:** God made the world and populated it with people. But it went south fast. One of my books on just the first book of the Bible is called ***Paradise to Prison!*** God made some stabs at bringing people back, like with Noah, whom Peter called a *preacher of righteousness.*<sup>2</sup> He left his fingerprints in the sky and on the earth as an eloquent witness that he was out there for people to find. He planted a conscience in every human heart to tug us back to God. But very, very few people were listening to God and most of the world was on a downhill slide to eternal destruction. **And then God did something really incredible**—He picked out one man to start a rescue mission that is still going gangbusters today!

1. God's Covenant with Abraham: **Genesis 12:1-3** *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**"*
  - That conversation happened about 4000 years ago and even today the Jews revere Abraham as their spiritual father. And as Christians, we respect Abraham as the father of all the faithful—because he believed God and God credited that faith to him as righteousness.
  - Abraham had a son named Isaac and a grandson named Jacob. And Jacob had twelve sons who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. This was the beginning of the "great nation" God had prophesied from Abraham—the great nation that be blessed by God and that would be a blessing to all peoples on earth. Here is the rescue plan renewed in Isaiah...
2. God's Design for His People, Israel: **Isaiah 49:3 & 6**, *He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor-- <sup>6</sup> he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also **make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.**"*
  - **Notice that this OT verse is quoted by Paul in verse 47 of our text...** *For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."* [Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6]

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<sup>2</sup> **2 Peter 2:5** ...protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

- **This applied first of all to the nation of Israel, as is clear from Isaiah 49:2,** *"You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor-"*
  - **It had ultimate and particular fulfillment in Jesus Christ, Messiah of Israel. The language gets first-person particular in Isaiah 49:6, he says:** *"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also **make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***
  - **And it has final application to the message of the church of Jesus Christ as Paul applies the words of Isaiah 49 to himself and Barnabas in verse 47, For this is what the **Lord has commanded us:** *"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."***
  - **I. Howard Marshall:** *Thus the task of Israel, which she failed to carry out, has passed to Jesus and then to his people as the new Israel; it is the task of bringing the light of revelation and salvation to all the peoples of the world...<sup>3</sup>*
  - **Deuteronomy 4:6-8** *Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." <sup>7</sup> What other nation is so great as to **have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us** whenever we pray to him? <sup>8</sup> And what other nation is so great as to have **such righteous decrees and laws** as this body of laws I am setting before you today?*
3. **But Israel didn't do very well with this rescue mission to the world. In fact they really blew it!!!**
- **Ezekiel 5:6-7** *Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees. <sup>7</sup> "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have been **more unruly** than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you.*
4. **So God sent His Son Jesus into the world who died for all our sins. And Jesus sent His followers out to win the whole world to faith in Jesus Christ.**
5. God's Commission to His Church: **Matthew 28:19-20,** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*
6. So here was Paul preaching to people. And here am I up here preaching to you. Paul then and I today are both audaciously telling our audiences that their eternal destiny is hanging in the balance and that we have the Rescue Plan! What gives us the chutzpah to say things like that?!
- This is God's message: **Verse 44, the word of the Lord. Verse 46, the word of God. Verse 48, the word of the Lord. Verse 49, the word of the Lord.**
  - This is God's message **about grace:** **Verse 43, urged them to continue in the grace of God**
  - This is God's message **about salvation:** **Verse 47, bring salvation to the ends of the earth.**
  - This is God's message **about historical facts:** **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also...*
- B. It's His **Power:** **Verse 48, all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**
1. What does it take for people to believe?

<sup>3</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*. 230.

- Jesus said: **John 6:44** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..."
- The Apostle Paul said: **Romans 8:29-30** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ...
- The Apostle Paul also said: **Romans 3:10-12** As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Hath blinded the eyes...
- God said to Paul in Corinth: **Acts 18:10** "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because **I have many people in this city.**"

2. Who makes this appointment?

- Not the sinner!
  - **Millard Erickson:** Some have attempted to argue that the verb here...should be understood as being in the middle voice rather than the passive. Their rendition of the last clause in this verse is "as many as appointed themselves to eternal life believed." There are several logical difficulties such an understanding, however. One's belief is supposedly a result of one's ordaining himself to eternal life. But how can a person who has not believed take such action? Note also the root meaning of the word [tasso]—"to arrange in an orderly fashion." Can an unregenerate and spiritually impotent person really arrange his life in an orderly fashion?<sup>4</sup>
- Not the evangelist!
- But God! *Appointed*="tasso." order, fix, determine, appoint
  - Compare **Acts 15:2**, So Paul and Barnabas were **appointed**, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem...
  - **Acts 22:10**, "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been **assigned** to do.'
  - I Howard Marshall (Acts) ties this verse with [Corinth] **Acts 18:10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.—**I. Howard Marshall:** The saying indicates divine foreknowledge of the success of the gospel in Corinth (cf. 13:48).<sup>5</sup>
  - **Charles Spurgeon:** I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I should never have chosen him; and I am sure he chose me before I was born, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love..<sup>6</sup>

II. WE ARE THE AMBASSADORS

A. Ambassadors Motivated by Passion. **Verse 43**, urged them to continue in the grace of God

1. Hear Paul's passion:

- **2 Corinthians 5:11** Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.
- **2 Corinthians 5:20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.
- **1 Corinthians 9:27** I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

<sup>4</sup> Millard Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 926

<sup>5</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 296.

<sup>6</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954, 1972), 227.

2. **William Carey:** *At a meeting of Baptist leaders in the late 1700s, a newly ordained minister stood to argue for the value of overseas missions. He was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."*

*Carey was impressed with early Moravian missionaries and was increasingly dismayed at his fellow Protestants' lack of missions interest. In response, he penned An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.*

*He argued that Jesus' Great Commission applied to all Christians of all times, and he castigated fellow believers of his day for ignoring it: "Multitudes sit at ease and give themselves no concern about the far greater part of their fellow sinners, who to this day, are lost in ignorance and idolatry."*

*Carey didn't stop there: in 1792 he organized a missionary society, and at its inaugural meeting preached a sermon with the call, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!" Within a year, Carey, John Thomas (a former surgeon), and Carey's family (which now included three boys, and another child on the way) were on a ship headed for India.<sup>7</sup>*

3. Paul went out into **his** mission field of the Mediterranean world...
4. And his first stop was in the local synagogue.<sup>8</sup> That wouldn't have worked for you and me, because we are Gentiles—but it was a tremendous opportunity for Paul because he was a card-carrying credentialed Jewish Rabbi who had graduated from one of the most prestigious Jewish schools of the world. So when he dropped in on a Saturday Sabbath servicer at the local synagogue, and people caught wind of the celebrity status of the guest, they eagerly invited him to speak. He did this in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium,<sup>9</sup> Thessalonica,<sup>10</sup> Berea, Athens, Corinth,<sup>11</sup> and Ephesus.<sup>12</sup> The synagogue was a ready-made venue for Paul's witness about Jesus.
5. I wonder where my "ready-made venue" is? It might be a kids' sports team. It might be a fitness club. It might be a weekday carpool. For Cornelius, it was his family circle. *Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. (Acts 10:24)*
6. For one pastor it was a hospital room. **Craig Groeschel story:** *I once visited a man named Mark in the hospital. Like Frank, Mark was not a believer in Christ, and he didn't have much time to live. At the tender age of forty-two, this husband and father of two had an advanced brain tumor.*  
*When I walked in, Mark recognized me. He was obviously in pain and he didn't look thrilled at my visit. "My wife sent you, didn't she, Preacher?" he said cuttingly.*  
*"As a matter of fact, she did," I replied. I was saddened that the conversation was already headed in an awkward direction. Mark had come to our church exactly*

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<sup>7</sup>ChristianHistory.net <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/131christians/missionaries/carey.html>. Accessed 082010

<sup>8</sup> Note how Jesus did the same thing: Luke 4: 16, "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, **as was his custom**. And he stood up to read." Cf. Luke 4:44 concerning the synagogues of Judea.

<sup>9</sup>Acts 14:1, "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went **as usual** into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. '

<sup>10</sup> Acts 17:2, "**As his custom was**, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said."

<sup>11</sup> When they kicked him out, he just moved his venue next door to the home of Mr. Justus and just kept preaching the Gospel. (Acts 18:7)

<sup>12</sup> After three months, Paul got so much opposition that he moved out of the synagogue and set up in the lecture hall of Tyrannus—for two more years. (Acts 19:9)

twice—once to see his daughter baptized, and once to a Christmas Eve service to satisfy his wife.

“I guess you came to ‘save’ me from hell,” Mark said, obviously positioning himself for a verbal conflict. My mind raced. What should I say? Should I play it down? Should I answer truthfully?

“Mark, that’s exactly why I’m here,” I said, holding my breath and praying for God’s guidance. “Your wife loves you more than you know, and frankly, she’s concerned for you spiritually. She’s tried to talk to you about Christ, but you always shut her down. She thought you might be willing to talk to me.”

Mark wasn’t rude, but he was firm. “I don’t have long to live. I don’t want to waste a minute of what’s left of my life talking about religion.” He grimaced in pain. “If you don’t mind, please shut the door on your way out so I can rest in peace.”

Not wanting to be pushy, I politely excused myself.

As I walked down the hospital hallway, my mind flashed back to Frank. Overwhelmed with sudden spiritual courage, I turned. I charged back into his room, and with tears in my eyes I blurted out, “You know what, Mark? That’s exactly what your family wants for you. They want you to rest in peace—eternally.”

Mark didn’t speak. For several awkward moments, we simply stared at each other. I didn’t know what else to say. He too seemed at a loss for words. I could have counted to two thousand in those moments of silence. Finally, Mark was the first to gather himself. His face softened slightly and he said, “Well?”

Seeing a crack in the door, I tried to open it and show him God’s good news. I began explain to him how God sent his Son Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. Soon I realized I hadn’t taken a breath, so I paused and asked hopefully, “Mark, would you like to trust Jesus with your eternity?”

Mark didn’t speak. He nodded his head gently, affirmatively.

We prayed together. I said the words and he repeated them. Moments later, I left.

Two days later I went back. Mark’s wife was sitting by the side of the bed, holding her husband’s hand. Although she was about to lose her husband, she beamed with assurance that she and her husband would be reunited in heaven. Though closer to death than ever, Mark’s eyes looked more alive than a healthy man’s.

“Preacher,” he said, affectionately this time, “God has forgiven me of all my sins.” Mark pushed his next words out slowly: “I’m going to see my family again in heaven one day.” He seemed deeply satisfied.

Mark held his wife’s hand with one hand, and he reached out to me with the other. I stepped forward and took it. He said, “You’ll never know what a difference you’ve made in my life.”<sup>13</sup>

B. Ambassadors Motivated by Responsibility. **Verse 46**, we had to speak...

1. This responsibility is compelling. **Verse 46**, we **had to** speak...

- “**Had to**” because the Jews were God’s chosen people. They were the portal of God’s grace to all the other nations of the world. Because of all his promises to the Jews, God designed that they would get the first shot at the Gospel.
- After all, Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.
- **Romans 1:16** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*
- **Matthew 10:5-6** *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.*
- **Matthew 15:24** *He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”*
- **But when they rejected it, then Paul turned to the Gentiles. This happened repeatedly in town after town, and finally Paul gave up on the Jews in Acts**

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<sup>13</sup> Craig Groeschel, *The Christian Atheist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 211-214.

**28:25-28** They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' <sup>28</sup> "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

- **But don't miss the responsibility word: "Had to..."**
  - **Jeremiah 9:2** *Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people.*
  - **Jeremiah 20:7-9** *O LORD, you deceived; me, and I was deceived you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. <sup>8</sup> Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. **Jeremiah 20:9** But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*
  - **So we work at it. Acts 14:1** *At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.*
2. This responsibility is dangerous. **Verse 50**, *They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.*
- **Verse 45**, *When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and **talked abusively [blasphemed]** against what Paul was saying.*
  - **John 15:20** *Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*
  - It always has been dangerous. Paul paid with his life. So did almost all the original Apostles.
  - It *still* is dangerous. We were all sobered at the recent news of the slaying of Christian medical workers in Afghanistan.
    - *Returning home from a three-week trek on foot to deliver free medical care to the remotest regions of the country, the aid workers — six Americans, a Briton, a German and four Afghans — had just finished eating when they were accosted by gunmen with long dyed-red beards, the police said. The gunmen marched them into the forest, stood them in a line and shot 10 of them one by one.... The police said the group of doctors, nurses and technicians were working for the International Assistance Mission, a Christian aid group that has operated in Afghanistan since 1966.<sup>14</sup>*

CONCLUSION:

**A. W. TOZER:** *A man by his sin may waste himself, which is to waste that which on earth is most like God. This is man's greatest tragedy and God's heaviest grief.*

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August 22, 2010

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<sup>14</sup> "Gunmen Kill Medical Aid Workers in Afghanistan" by Rod Nordland. Published: August 7, 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/08/world/asia/08afghan.html?pagewanted=1& r=1>. Accessed 082210.