

BEAUTIFUL FEET ON ROUGH TERRAIN¹

Our Lord Jesus' clear command

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." Matt 28:18-20
"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" Acts 1:8
"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" John 20:21

We are all familiar with Jesus' great commission to us. And we readily say "Amen". But I think most of us struggle with the 'costs' associated with going. We prefer to think that even when the terrain may be somewhat rough, the final outcome in human terms will not be too costly.

Remember what Jesus went through

Jesus, our Lord, was not accorded a welcome when he came into this world. John tells us: *"He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him."* John 1:11. He was rejected by His own created beings. In fact, Peter in his sermon at Pentecost, boldly preached: *"This man [Jesus] was handed to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him on the cross."* Acts 2:23. Our Lord was rejected by people in this world. We, His servants, must not be surprised when we are not welcomed by people who do not know Him, or who oppose Him.

God's love extends to the nations

The nations feature prominently in God's salvation plan. John 3:16 brings to our attention that all peoples in this world are the object of God's love. The promise of eternal life is to "whoever believes in Him". We must not miss the many references in the Old Testament to the "nations" coming to worship the Lord. Isaiah spoke of the Lord's purpose when he prophesied *"I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth"* Isa 49:6. Likewise, the Psalmist exhorts:

"Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples... Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." Ps 96:3,10

And in Matthew 28:19 Jesus' commanded that we must *"go and make disciples of all nations ..."*. In fact, the instructions given in Acts 1:8 tell us clearly that our Lord expects his witnesses to go *"to the ends of the earth"*, exactly as expressed in Isaiah 49:6. Jesus also said: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end shall come"* Matt 24:14.

There are several vital lessons here:

- The Lord loves the nations
- The Lord desires that the nations come and worship Him
- The Lord expects His disciples to preach the good news to the nations

That is precisely how the gospel came to us. Someone obeyed the Lord and came to our part of the world, told us the good news and we have come to worship the Lord. Others need to hear as well!

Beautiful feet

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” Rom 10:15. Feet are the instruments of travel. They are seldom regarded as objects of beauty. But feet that are surrendered to God for His use are described as “beautiful”. Like the ancient ‘town crier’ who went about to convey good news to as many people as possible, so too are God’s servants who go about proclaiming the good news.

The terrain can be rough

We need to remember that fulfilling the great commission is spiritual work. That’s why we need the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s why the Lord reminded that all authority has been given to him and promised to be with us always. The early disciples went through rough patches. Peter and the apostles were flogged and ordered not to speak of Jesus (Acts 5:40). Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60). Paul and Silas experienced beatings and imprisonment (Acts 16:16-40). I don’t think we are suggesting that mission trips should be targeted at the most resistant places. Neither are we suggesting that those who bring good news would definitely be roughed up. But I believe all of us need to be aware that the terrain can be rough. In fact, Jesus has warned his disciples of possible persecution by the nations because of him (Matt 24:9).

The priority of prayer

Jesus emphasized the priority of prayer in missions (Matt 9:37-38). The church in Antioch devoted themselves to worshipping the Lord, fasting and praying before sending out Barnabas and Saul to the mission field (Acts 13:1-3). They discerned the Lord’s will. In many of Paul’s letters, he often requested for

prayers (e.g. Eph 6:19-20, Col 4:2-4). He was also very conscious that fellow believers were praying for him (Phil 1:19). We need to pray, to seek the Lord for His direction, to have the courage to go where He leads us. At times, these may be places where things will not be smooth. In coming before the Lord in prayer, we are acknowledging that His ways and His thoughts are far higher than ours (Isa 55:8) and that His purpose will be accomplished (Isa 46:10).

Open doors and closed doors

One common question raised is, “What about closed doors? Do we read that as an indication from the Lord that we should not enter?” As I reflect on this question, my attention is drawn to Revelation 3:7. The truth here is that the Lord is the One who opens and closes doors. So neither governments nor military regimes can prevent God from accomplishing His purpose. Looking at the account in Acts 16:6-7, we learn that it is the Holy Spirit who informs us when the door is open or closed. And reading on in Paul and Silas’ prison account, we note that a door of opportunity for the gospel was opened following the suffering of the Lord’s servants. The jailer and his family believed! (Acts 16:36). Opposition is not necessarily an indication of a closed door as in Acts 14:1-3.

A glimpse of the final outcome

We are privileged to be given a view of the final outcome before the Lord’s throne. This is how John described it: *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...”*

Revelation 7:9. Isn't it wonderful? Salvation belongs to our God. And He has given us the privilege to be involved in His mission.

Conclusion

Jesus said: "*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" *John 20:21*. The work that we are entrusted to do by our Lord Jesus is the Father's work. This is God's mission. He will accomplish His purpose. As we go forth, we can be assured that the Lord has promised He will be with us, to the very end of the age. May we be a people who are willing to obey the Lord's commission, wherever He sends us.

David L.T. Yap
Pastor/ Elder

¹ This article was written in response to questions raised in the wake of the South Korean hostage crisis in Afghanistan. The purpose is to draw our attention to key Biblical principles we use when doing missions, which includes going to places with rough terrain.