

Marked for Death! Messengers of Life!...The Life and Ministry of The Judson's

Romans 8:28-39

Introduction: 1) Adoniram Judson is the father of the American Baptist missionary movement. Eugene Harrison calls him “the apostle of the love of Christ in Burma.” He left American soil as a Congregationalist. Arriving in India, having carefully studied the New Testament, he became a Baptist. He was baptized by an associate of William Carey. He would eventually go to Burma where he labored for nearly 40 years. He would translate the whole Bible into Burmese, spend 21 months in a brutal prison, and bury 2 wives and too many children to number. Divine providence indeed marked him for death, while also making him a messenger of life.

2) Born in 1788 in Massachusetts, he would die in 1850 and be buried at sea. No earthly grave marks his departure from this world into the world of his King Jesus. Fred Barlow said it well when he wrote, “by whatever measurement you measure the man Judson, the measurement always is the same – he was a mighty man!”

3) Romans 8:28-39 is written “all over the life” of this wonderful Baptist missionary. Indeed, had he not been confident of the truths contained in these verses, he would have never “finished the race” and “kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:8). Many of us will likewise be sustained only by the same.

4) Four lessons leap from this text for our blessing and benefit. Each was marvelously lived out in Adoniram Judson. Each comes in the form of a divine promise.

I. We have His providence.

8:28-32

- Paul affirms that there are no accidents in the life of the child of God, only providence. In 8:28 we are given a:

- 1) certain promise (We know)
 - 2) comprehensive promise (All things)
 - 3) comforting promise (Work together for good)
 - 4) chosen promise (Those who love God)
 - 5) clear promise (Called according to His purpose)
- Paul also affirms the signed, sealed and settled nature of our salvation thru what has been called the “golden chain of redemption.” The chain has 5 links located in vs. 29-30 1) foreknew 2) predestined 3) called 4) justified 5) glorified. These are certain realities in the plan and purpose of God.
 - Such a glorious and certain salvation has very definite and wonderful consequences: 1) God is for us (v.31) and 2) He will give us everything we need for His glory and our good (v.32).
 - How did this divine providence work itself out in Judson’s life? Let me note 3.
 - 1) His family and education. Mentally – he was a giant. He read at the age of three, took navigation lessons at ten, studied theology as a child, and entered Providence College (now Brown University) at seventeen. Despite the fact his father was a Congregational preacher, and in spite of his mother’s “tears and pleadings,” Judson was not saved until he was 20 years of age. In college he became a confirmed deist – due largely to the influence of a brilliant unbelieving student at Brown who set out to win Judson to his deistic faith. That man was Jacob Eames of Belfast, Maine. Keep that name in mind.
 - 2) His conversion – No conversion, saved the apostle Paul’s, is any more providential in its character than that of Adoniram. After graduation Judson

left home to become a wanderlust, confirmed and growing in his deistic convictions. One night, while traveling, he stopped to stay in a country inn. His room was adjacent to the room of a dying man. The moaning and groaning of that man through the long night permitted Judson no sleep. His thoughts troubled him. All night questions assailed his soul: “Was the dying man prepared to die?” “Where would he spend eternity?” “Was he a Christian, calm and strong in the hope of life in Heaven?” “Or, was he a sinner shuddering in the dark brink of the lower region?” Judson constantly chided himself for even entertaining such thoughts contrary to his philosophy of life beyond the grave, and thought how his brilliant college friend would rebuke him if he learned of these childish worries.

But the next morning, when Judson was leaving, he was informed that the man had died. He inquired of the proprietor as to the identity of the dead man. He was shocked by the staggering statement that he heard: “He was a brilliant young person from Providence College. Eames was his name.”

Jacob Eames was the unbeliever who had destroyed Judson’s faith. “Now he was dead—and was lost! Was lost! Was lost! Lost! Lost!” Those words raced through his brain, rang in his ears, roared in his soul – “Was lost! Lost! Lost!” There and then Judson realized he was lost, too! He immediately ended his traveling, returned home, and entered Andover Theological Seminary. Soon he “sought God for the saving of his soul.” Shortly thereafter he was saved and dedicated his life to the Master’s service! Joining a group at Andover called “the Brethren,” an outgrowth of the famous “Haystack Revival,” he would

answer God's call to be a missionary. This would lead him to turn down a golden opportunity both at Brown and an influential church in Plymouth. The latter broke the heart of his mother who on hearing of the offer rejoiced say, "And you will be so near home." Adoniram however replied, "I shall never live in Boston. I have further than that to go." Neither the tears of his mother and sister nor the hopes and dreams of his father could deter him from his call to go to the nations for Jesus sake.

3) His wife – God led Adoniram both to the right woman and, I should add, the right father-in-law. Ann (Nancy) Hasseltine would become the first woman missionary from America to go overseas. She would die at the young age of 37. The 2 children she bore (she also miscarried at least once) would die in infancy, Roger Williams at 8 months and Maria at 27 months. Ann was saved at 16 and married Adoniram when she was 23. Brilliant in her own right, she learned Burmese and Siamese, did translation work, and cared for her husband tirelessly during his imprisonment. There is little doubt this dedication cost her, her life. Having been smitten by Ann, Adoniram wrote a letter to her father asking for her hand in marriage, and also one to Ann where he lays bare his heart for her and the mission God has burdened his soul. Both letters are legendary among missionaries.

1) Letter to Mr. Hasseltine:

"I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world? Whether you can consent to her departure to a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal

influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

2) Letter to Ann:

"January 1, 1811. Tuesday Morning

It is with the utmost sincerity, and with my whole heart, that I wish you, my love, a happy new year. May it be a year in which your walk will be close with God; your frame calm and serene; and the road that leads you to the Lamb marked with purer light. May it be a year in which you will have more largely the spirit of Christ, be raised above sublunary things, and be willing to be disposed of in this world just as God shall please. As every moment of the year will bring you nearer the end of your pilgrimage, may it bring you nearer to God, and find you more prepared to hail the messenger of death as a deliverer and a friend. And now, since I have begun to wish, I will go on. May this be the year in which you will change your name; in which you will take a final leave of your relatives and native land; in which you will cross the wide ocean, and dwell on the other side of the world, among a heathen people. What a great change will this year probably effect in our lives! How very different will be our situation and employment! If our lives are preserved and our attempt prospered, we shall next new year's day be in India, and perhaps wish each other a happy new year in the uncouth dialect of Hindostan or Burmah. We shall no more see our kind friends around us, or enjoy the conveniences of civilized life, or go to the house of God with those that keep holy day; but swarthy countenances will everywhere meet our eye, the jargon of an unknown tongue will assail our ears, and we shall witness the assembling of the heathen to celebrate the worship of idol gods. We shall be weary of the world, and wish for wings like a dove, that we may fly away and be at rest. We shall probably experience seasons when we shall be 'exceeding sorrowful, even unto

death.' We shall see many dreary, disconsolate hours, and feel a sinking of spirits, anguish of mind, of which now we can form little conception. O, we shall wish to lie down and die. And that time may soon come. One of us may be unable to sustain the heat of the climate and the change of habits; and the other may say, with literal truth, over the grave- -

'By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed;
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed;
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorned;
but whether we shall be honored and mourned by strangers,
God only knows. At least, either of us will be certain of one mourner. In view of such scenes shall we not pray with earnestness 'O for an overcoming faith?'"

13 months later they would marry. A few days later they sailed for Calcutta on their way, by unseen providence, to Rangoon, Burma. Yes, the child of God has the Lord's providence.

II. We have his prayers. 8:33-34

- The child of God has a double divine blessing in the department of prayer. In vs. 26-27 we learn that the Spirit of God prays in us. In vs. 33-34 we learn that in heaven the Son of God prays for us. In heart and up there (heaven) deity intercedes for the child of God.
- In v. 33 the theme of our justification is brought forward once again (cf. v. 30). Using a courtroom analogy, Paul points out no one can successfully bring a charge or accusation that will stick against a believer because God has declared us just from His bar as judge.
- Verse 34 builds on v. 33 and settles the issue decisively once and for all. Who can charge or condemn us at the Judgment with the hope that we will be found guilty? Again the answer is no one! Why? 4 reasons are given: 1) Christ died

[for us]; 2) He is raised [for us]; 3) He is exalted at God's right hand [for us]; and 4) He continually makes intercession for us (cf. Heb. 7:25).

- Hallelujah! What a Savior!
- Knowing of the intercession of Jesus was crucial to Judson. Sometimes it was all he had to lean on in the midst of sorrow and suffering. How so?

No Welcome in India. Arriving in India, the East India Company forced them to leave as they tried to settle at different places. They lived four months on the Isle of France, where they learned of the death of Mrs. Newell, Ann's best friend, a 17 year old teen, who had sailed with them from America to serve as a fellow missionary. She is the first American martyr of Foreign Missions. Finally they found a resting place on July 13, 1812, at Rangoon, Burma. Here, by their sweat, labor and blood the gospel would be planted among the hostile Burmese peoples.

Labors in Burma. In Rangoon the first ten years of missionary labors were given mainly to the mastering of the Burmese language. They had no grammar, dictionary or English-speaking teacher. Three years later to the day of their arrival, he completed a grammar for the Burmese language. On May 20, 1817, he finished the translation of Matthew; he also wrote tracts, concise, clear statements of Bible truth, and gave them out discriminatingly and prayerfully. These identified his first serious inquirers after truth. After almost 7 years in Burma, on April 4, 1819, Judson ventured to preach his first public discourse. Sitting in a traditional Burmese *Zayat* by the roadside he would call out, "Ho! Everyone that thirsteth for knowledge." (*TGS*, 221). On June 27 he baptized Moungh Hau, his

first Burmese convert. Many others who had also been taught would soon follow. By 1822 there were 18 converts he could count after 10 years of laboring.

In Prison. In 1824 war broke out between Burma and the English Government of India and the Judsons were looked upon as English spies. On June 8, 1824, Judson was arrested and put in the horrible prison of Oung-pen-la. It was forty by thirty; five feet high, with no ventilation other than the cracks between the boards. “In this room were confined one hundred persons of both sexes and all nationalities, nearly all naked, and half famished. The prison was never washed or even swept. Putrid remains of animal and vegetable matter, together with nameless abominations, strewed the floor. In this place of torment Mr. Judson lay with five pairs of fetters on his legs and ankles, weighing about fourteen pounds, the marks of which he carried to his dying day. At nightfall, lest the prisoners should escape, a bamboo pole was placed between the legs and then drawn up by means of pulleys to a height which allowed only their shoulders to rest on the ground while their feet depended from the iron rings of the fetters.” Mosquitoes would often land and eat away the broken flesh of their feet nearly driving them mad. He endured twenty-one months of prison life, nearly dying on several occasions. Of all of the British POW’s all but one would die.

His Heroic Wife. Judson was not the only sufferer. His wife Ann was without support or protection. Yet she brought food to the prison day after day and with bribes, passed the officials and gave relief to her husband and some of the other suffering prisoners. She gave birth to a child, and after twenty-one days carried the little girl in her arms to show to her father in prison. The child contracted

small-pox; then the mother herself was inflicted with the same disease, followed closely by spotted fever, which brought her close to death. After many petitions, she secured permission for her husband to come out of prison, and he, with fetters on and a guard following, carried their crying baby about the streets, begging Burman mothers to nurse the child. Ann could not nurse her own little girl, she was so emaciated and weak.

- During this time Adoniram and Ann tried to remain strong, despite the fact that their health deteriorated and death nearly claimed each of them on numerous occasions. Judson once remarked, “it is possible my life will be spared, if so, with what zeal shall I pursue my work! If not – His will be done. The door will be open for others who will do the work better.” (*TGS*, 334).
- Later, toward the end of his imprisonment, his faith would be severely tested. Courtney Anderson summarizes the situation: “His daughter was starving before his eyes; Ann was nearly dead, his translation was lost; he himself was marked for death” (*TGS*, 349).
- I am convinced it was the prayers of the Savior that sustained him during those days.

III. We have his power.

8:35-37

- Life, by its very nature, is filled with sorrow and suffering, hardships and disappointments. Yet, no thing in this life can conquer the child of God. Why? We have His prayers (v.34) and His love (v. 37 and 39) which gives us the victory.

- Paul notes 7 realities that will come against but cannot conquer the child of God in v. 35 [Note them].
- In v. 36 he passionately notes the precious lives given for the sake of King Jesus. This destiny was foretold in Ps. 44:22.
- Yet in all of this and more, we are “more than conquerors,” *hupernikomen*; “super conquerors” thru Him who loves us. Do you see it? His great power is wedded to and made active by His great love, a power that can keep us going “against all odds!” Adoniram Judson desperately needed to know this.
- Eventually he was released from prison. He quickly made his way to Ann and little Maria. Listen to what he met in the words of Eugene Harrison:

One of the most pathetic pages in the history of Christian missions is that which describes the scene when Judson was finally released and returned to the mission house seeking Ann, who again had failed to visit him for some weeks. As he ambles down the street as fast as his maimed ankles would permit, the tormenting question kept repeating itself, “is Ann still alive?” Upon reaching the house, the first object to attract his attention was a fat, half-naked Burman woman squatting in the ashes beside a pan of coals and holding on her knees an emaciated baby, so begrimed with dirt that it did not occur to him that it could be his own. Across the foot of the bed, as though she had fallen there, lay a human object that, at the first glance, was no more recognizable than his child. The face was of a ghastly paleness and the body shrunken to the last degree of emaciation. The glossy black curls had all been shorn from the finely-shaped head. There lay the faithful and devoted wife who had followed him so unwearily from prison to prison, ever alleviating his distresses and consoling him in his trials. Presently Ann felt warm tears falling upon her face and, rousing from her daze, saw Adoniram at her side.” She suffered from spotted fever and cerebral meningitis. Amazingly she survived, but only briefly. In less than a year, while away out of necessity, he received what is known as “the blacked sealed letter.” Told by its deliverer that he was sorry to inform Adoniram of the death

of his little Maria, he opened the letter only to read: “My Dear Sir: To one who has suffered so much and with such exemplary fortitude, there needs but little preface to tell a tale of distress. It were cruel indeed to torture you with doubt and suspense. To sum up the unhappy tidings in a few words – Mrs. Judson is no more.” (*TGS*, 370).

Ann had died a month earlier while he was away. His beautiful and faithful helper had gone to be with her King.

Six months later, on April 24, 1827 little Maria slipped into eternity and into the arms of Jesus, united so quickly to her mother.

- Death seemed to be all about him. For a period of months he was plunged into despair and depression. He would flee to the jungle and live the life of a hermit for some time questioning himself, his calling, even his faith.
 - He demanded all his letters to America be destroyed (*TGS*, 390).
 - He renounced the D.D. degree bestowed upon him by Brown.
 - He gave all his private wealth, a sizable sum, to the Baptist Mission Board.
 - He requested a cut in salary.
 - He dug a grave near his Hermitage and for days sat beside it staring into it.
 - On October 24, 1829, the 3rd anniversary of Ann’s death, he would write, “God is to me the Great

Unknown. I believe in Him, but I find Him not” (*TGS*, 391).

- However, God’s power and love did not fail him. He would emerge from the valley of the shadow of death in the strength of his Good Shephard. He would say of these days, “there is a love that never fails. If I had not felt certain, that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings.”
- Adoniram Judson would marry twice more. In 1834 he married Sarah Boardman, a precious and wonderful lady who had lost her missionary husband in death. Married for 11 years, she would bear him 8 children, 5 of whom would survive into adulthood.
- In 1846 he married Emily Chabbuck. They would spend not quite 4 years together as Adoniram would die April 12, 1850. Emily would die 4 years later in New York of T.B., another slaughtered sheep for her Savior.

IV. We have his promise.

8: 38-39

- These final verses of Romans 8 constitute what some call “the grand persuasion.” Added to the 7 items of v. 35, are 9 additional realities that have no hope, no chance, of separating the child of God from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Such a promise accompanied Judson who would finish his Burmese translation of the Bible on January 31, 1834. He did a complete revision that was finished in 1840. see a great move of God among the Karen people in Burma, see 7, 000 baptized in Burma by his death, and see 63 congregations established under 163 missionaries, native pastors and assistants at his translation to heaven. Today the Myanmar Baptist Convention has more than 600,000 members in 3513 churches. All of this goes back to the Judson's. I mentioned the Karen people and the movement of God among them. This in and of itself is a remarkable evidence of the providence of God preparing a particular people for the gospel. Listen to the historical record of what occurred:

In the year 1828 an event of vast significance took place. Having come in contact with the Karens, a race of wild people living in remote and almost inaccessible jungles, Judson longed for the opportunity of winning a Karen for Christ and thus reaching his race. This opportunity came to him through Ko Tha Byu, a Karen slave who was sold one day in the bazaar in Moulmein and bought by a native Christian, who forthwith brought him to Judson to be taught and, if possible, evangelized. Ko Tha Byu was a desperate robber bandit. He had taken part in approximately thirty murders and was a hardened criminal with a vicious nature and an ungovernable temper. Patiently, prayerfully, and lovingly, Judson instructed the wretched, depraved creature, who eventually not only yielded to the transforming power of Christ but went through the jungles as a flaming evangelist among his people. The hearts of the Karens were remarkably and providentially prepared for the reception of the gospel message by a tradition prevalent among them to this effect:

Long, long ago the Karen elder brother and his young white brother lived close together. God gave each of them a Book of Gold containing all they needed for their salvation, success and happiness. The Karen brother neglected and lost his Book of Gold and so he fell into a wretched type of existence, ignorant and cruelly oppressed by the Burmese. The white brother, however, prized his Golden Book, or Book of God, and so, when he sailed away across the oceans, God greatly blessed him. Some day the white brother will return, bringing with him God's Book, which,

if the Karen people will receive and obey, will bring to them salvation and untold blessings.

Accordingly, as Ko Tha Byu went on his unwearying preaching tours through the jungles, declaring that the long-looked-for white brother had returned with God's Book, hundreds received the message with gladness.

When a depraved slave, a bandit and murderer, was brought to Judson in 1828, who would have imagined that, a century later, the Christian Karens alone would have many splendid high schools, hundreds of village schools, some 800 self-supporting churches and a Christian constituency of more than 150,000?

Conclusion

On March 4, 1831 Adoniram Judson wrote a letter to his fellow missionary Cephas Bennett, who was a printer, requesting 15 to 20, 000 tracts. Attending the great annual Buddhist festival at the Shwe Dagon in Rangoon, they experienced a mighty movement of God's Spirit and an increased interest in the gospel. Listen as we close to what he wrote, and may his words burn deep into our hearts never ever to depart:

“[We have distributed} nearly ten thousand tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been six thousand applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China – “Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.” Others come from the frontiers of Kathay, a hundred miles north of Ava – “sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.” Others come from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known – “Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells about Jesus Christ.” (*TGS*, 399).