

WALK YOUR DESTINY

“And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, the Lord is with thee, THOU MIGHTY MAN OF VALOUR” [Judges 6: 11-12]

*Most of us are familiar with the **Polaroid** camera that prints pictures on the spot. Soon after the picture is shot, a blank print comes out. However, gradually, the picture begins to emerge until it is fully developed. Let us assume that you shot the picture of somebody who was ignorant of the Polaroid technology. If you were to give the print to that person soon after and tell him or her, “here’s your lovely picture!” what do you think that they would say? The likelihood is that they would almost tear up the picture and be angry with you for insulting their intelligence!*

*God is like that photographer. Even before we were born, He had shot the picture of our destiny here on earth, and like the people in the story above, we might not be aware of it unless He told us. He told Jeremiah, “before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and I ordained thee as a prophet unto the nations” [Jer. 1:5]. His thoughts toward us are “thoughts of peace, and not of evil, **to give you an expected end**” [Jer. 29:11] While we are here on earth, our expected end is the realization of our full potential, that is, the destiny that He has planned for us, the station in life where we can glorify Him. But, are we patient enough for the full picture to develop?*

Right now, many of us are hurting. We are regretting our station in life. Our past is littered with unfulfilled promises and unrealized dreams. What we had thought was an oasis of hope in the desert of want has turned into a mirage. Like Gideon, we are now hiding from people (creditors, friends, colleagues, rivals, etc) who used to look up to us. Like the Prodigal Son, we can now only afford the food meant for animals even when we are supposed to be sons and daughters of the King.

Happily, there is hope for us. Gideon was behaving like a coward but God saw him as a mighty man of valour! He walked his destiny and became known as Jerubbaal for destroying Baal’s altar [Judg. 6:32], a mighty man of valour, in deed! What is God’s destiny for us and how shall we attain it? That is the subject of today’s lesson.

1. Our destiny

. In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells the story of 3 servants who had received five, two and one talents respectively. The first and second doubled what they had been given through prudent investment while the third hoarded what he had been given. When their master came back, he rewarded each of them in accordance with the following principle: *“unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath”* [Matt. 25: 29].

When we die, we shall account to God for what we have done with the talents and opportunities that He has made available to us here on earth [Eccl. 12: 14; Rev. 22: 12]. As “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” we are expected to show “forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” [1 Pet. 2:9]. Therefore, it is important for us to prepare ourselves to successfully serve as labourers in His vineyard in such capacities as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers [Eph. 4:11], administrators, prayer warriors, healers and helpers [1 Cor. 12:28]. We have good examples to imitate. Moses successfully transited from fugitive to deliverer, Gideon from coward to warrior, and Paul from persecutor to Apostle.

2. The journey to our destiny

God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise [1 Cor. 1:27]. A “Nature Study” lesson that I learned in primary school in the 1950’s has just flooded my memory. Our class teacher brought two creatures to the classroom: a caterpillar and a butterfly. She asked us if there was any connection between the two. All of us shook our heads, indicating that there was none. The patient lady did not dispute with us. She simply took us to the school garden and showed us a place to observe over the next few weeks. There were some caterpillars crawling all over the leaves of the trees in the garden, similar to the one that she had brought to the classroom. To our surprise, we saw the caterpillars slowly metamorphose (change form) into butterflies, which flew all around the schoolyard. The journey to our destiny can follow the same process.

The butterfly’s destiny

The butterfly is one of the flying creatures created by God on the fifth day to “multiply in the earth” [Gen. 1:20-22]. The insect feeds on nectar from flowering plants. In doing so, it fertilises plants that bear fruits, which serve as food for human beings and beasts. Therefore, it plays a major role in sustaining human lives. By studying the metamorphosis of the butterfly, we can have a good idea of how God wants us to walk to our destiny. Now, come with me!

1) Stage 1: Incubation

The fertilised egg is laid by the female butterfly on a leaf, which it instinctively knows can keep the egg safe. That notwithstanding, the egg can still be swept off by rain or wind or eaten by predators. In like manner, our destiny begins as a seed (word of God) planted in our hearts. The seed may land by the “way side” of our hearts and be stolen by Satan, or land on “stony ground” and, therefore, lack roots, or on “thorns” and be choked by our material pursuits [**Matt. 13:19-22**]. However, if we are receptive to the call, the seed will fall on good ground, germinate and bear fruits.

Mary was told that she would become the mother of Jesus. After gaining an understanding of the matter, she told the angel, “behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word” [**Lk 1:38**]. It took much longer for Moses [**Ex. 4:1-9**] and Gideon [**Judg. 6:17-40**] to allow the seed to take root. For Jonah, he bought a one-way ticket to escape from God rather than accept His call. He was brought back in a submarine of a whale! [**Jon. 1:3-17**]

2) Stage 2: Internalisation

When the egg hatches, what emerges is the larva or caterpillar. It eats leaves or flowers almost all the time, including the shells of the egg from which it has hatched. Then, it loses its old skin several times, as it grows bigger. There is no resemblance of any kind between the caterpillar and the adult butterfly!

After accepting His call, we need to eat God’s word so as to feed our faith to maturity. The Psalmist says, “how sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” [**Ps. 119:103**]. Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” [**Jer. 15:16**]. Mary felt so good about the Seed of God growing within her that she exclaimed, “My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” [**Lk 1:46-47**]. It can be quite intoxicating and we may be eager to try out the new wine! David fought with lions and bears that attacked his flock [**1 Sam. 17:34-36**] and went on to kill the giant, Goliath [**1 Sam. 17: 45-51**]. But, it is still a long distance to where God is leading us, as Peter soon found out when he denied Jesus thrice [**Lk 22:54-62**]. A disciple told Jesus, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father” [**Matt. 8:18-21**] after he learnt that it was not going to be easy to follow Him.

3) Stage 3: The Transformation

The caterpillar turns into a pupa (chrysalis), with a hard outer shell, attached to a twig. Consequently, this is a resting stage. Inside the hard case, the caterpillar changes into a butterfly. This stage may take more than 60% of the whole period of metamorphosis.

This is analogous to the ‘wilderness experience.’ The only way God can tame us is to take us to a place where we lose self-control and surrender to His will. There, He will train us to know Him and to hear His voice when He calls. That is why He enjoins us to “be still and know that I am God” [Ps. 46:10]. However, unlike the butterfly and other creations of God, we can exercise our free will as we choose. As Paul has put it, “without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly” [Philemon 14]. So, if we do not accept to be disciplined, God will use others.

Moses was 80 years old when he encountered God in the burning bush. He was trained to cultivate faith and by the time he encountered Pharaoh, he was no longer the fugitive [Ex. 3:1-22; 4: 1-31]. John the Baptist lived on locusts and wild honey in the wilderness of Judaea [Matt. 3:1-4], while Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness in preparation for His earthly ministry [Matt. 4:1-2]. Paul spent three years in the Arabian desert after his encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus [Gal. 1:11-18].

You can not hurry the pupa stage or else the butterfly will not be fully formed and it may never fly. Similarly, we cannot hurry God to take us out of the wilderness until it is His time. Joseph spent two more years in jail after helping the Pharaoh’s butler because if it had been a day less, he would not have become the governor of Egypt [Gen. 41:1-14]. After the Israelites had left Egypt, “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest per adventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt” [Ex. 13:17]. Therefore, we need patience if we are to finally get there!

4) Stage 4: Externalisation

The butterfly that emerges is a new creature compared to the caterpillar that went inside the pupa. It cannot eat. It only drinks, using its straw-like proboscis. After the necessary period of rest to energise the wings, the butterfly begins to fly, mate and reproduce, as it is destined to do.

The Psalmist says, ”oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest” [Ps. 55:6]. Like the butterfly, we have become a new creature when we are in Christ, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” [2 Cor. 5:17]. That is why Paul can say with confidence, “I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe and therefore speak” [2 Cor. 4:13]. With only 300 men, Gideon destroyed 120,000 enemies of God [Judg. 7:22-8:10]. The same Peter who had denied Jesus thrice became the leader of the Apostles, and his first sermon brought 3,000 converts into the church [Acts 2:41]. Fugitive Moses led over two million people out of Egypt and into freedom. By our God, we can “run through a troop” and leap over a high wall [Ps. 18:29].

3. Lessons

Where does our problem lie? It is certainly not knowing what God has told us because He has promised that in the last days, “I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions; and your old men shall dream dreams [**Joel 2:28-32**]. The problem lies in our refusal to enlist for service in the Lord’s vineyard after enjoying the material blessings from Him! We did not bargain for this aspect of true worship!

Among the various reasons for our disobedience, the following should be noted:

(a) Inertia

We hate instability or uncertainty. Why give up the known for the unknown? When God granted David authority to attack the Philistines and save the people of Keilah, his generals said, “we be afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we came to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?” [**1 Sam. 23:3**]. In spite of the fact that God fed the Israelites angel’s food in the wilderness, they missed the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic that they used to eat in Egypt [**Num. 11:5**].

(b) We hate to feel pain

If a caterpillar wants to become a butterfly, it has to pass through the pupa. Similarly, the wilderness experience is inevitable for those who want to be used as God’s vessels of honour. In a great house, according to Paul, the vessels of honour are silver and gold wares that are only used for special occasions. The earthenwares and wooden items are used for routine purposes [**2 Tim. 2:20-21**]. Interestingly, the vessels of honour passed through more fire than the rest. That is why Jesus has said, “he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me” [**Matt. 10:38**]. He also says that He prunes (i.e., trims) the branch that bears fruit “that it may bring forth more fruit” [**Jn 15:2**]. Ouch! Pruning is painful!

(c) We are impatient

We may be ready to bear pain but not for long. “If God wants to use me, let Him go ahead instead of insisting on my suffering!” so we complain. But, which good father will not allow his children to pass through necessary pain? Even God Himself allowed His Only Begotten Son to die an ignoble death on the Cross. We should learn to “glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience, experience, and experience, hope” [**Rom. 5:3-4**].

4. Conclusion

All is not lost. No matter what has happened before now, let us resolve today to do what God has commanded us. ***It is a privilege for God to invite us and it is by His grace [Jn 15:16].*** We have faith. We have the desire. All we need now is to allow the caterpillar of our human nature to enter into the pupa of God's crucible so that the butterfly of the new man in Christ can emerge and "mount up with wings as eagles" [Is. 40:31]. Let's get out of the rot today, right now!