

THE UNSTOPPABLE WORSHIPPER



C H A P T E R S I X

THE year is 1744. Hymn writer CHARLES Wesley is in Leeds, ENGLAND, HOLDING a prayer meeting in an upstairs room. Suddenly there is a creak in the floorboards, followed by a massive crack, and the whole floor collapses. All 100 people crash right through the ceiling into the room below. The place is in chaos—some are screaming, some are crying, some just sit in shock. But as the dust settles, Wesley, wounded and lying in a heap, cries out, “fear not! the LORD is with us; our lives are all safe.” and then he breaks out into the DOXOLOGY: “PRAISE GOD, from whom all blessings flow”—perhaps a bizarre choice of song, considering what has just happened! But here’s the point: While everyone else was still licking their wounds, the heart of this unstoppable worshipper was responding with unshakable praise.¹

Unstoppable worshippers will never quit when it comes to adoring God. Faced with opposition, danger or even death, they just keep going. We're told of worshippers in the Early Church who, more than simply enduring, actually rejoiced "because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

True worship often meets with opposition. Take the life of David. His first triumph was a powerful public act of unstoppable worship. The giant Goliath had put fear into all Israel, and the whole nation was afraid to stand up against him for the honor of God's name. Then, in walks David—too small for a suit of armor and, as Saul tells him, still only a boy. Yet this passionate lover of God can't stand to see the armies of the living God made a fool of, and he walks out onto that battlefield so "the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:46). Goliath looks him over and despises him (see v. 42). But anointed by God and driven by passion for Him, David overcomes. The worship of God wins the day.

That wasn't the only time David was despised for being a worshipper. In the undignified episode when David danced before God with all his might, his own wife despised him. To the heart of God it was a beautiful act of worship. But in the eyes of Michal it was a complete embarrassment (see

2 Samuel 6:16). And she wasn't the only one in David's family who despised his passion for God. Check out Psalm 69:

Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head. . . . For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; *for zeal for your house consumes me*, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me (vv. 4,7-9, italics added).

The giant Goliath was perhaps an obvious enemy to David's worship of God—the sort of opposition you'd expect when you stand up on a battlefield for the honor of God's name. But the opposition from within his own family was very different and an enemy which I'm sure he would have found even harder to overcome.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian in Germany at the time of World War II, once said: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."² Obviously he was talking of dying to self—taking up our cross, denying ourselves and following Jesus. But for Bonhoeffer it turned out to have a much more literal meaning. At the age of 39, very close to

the end of the war, he was taken out of prison and hanged for his courageous stand against Hitler and the Nazi party.

UNSTOPPABLE WORSHIPPERS
ARE ADVENTUROUS HEARTS,
taking every opportunity to
demonstrate the good news
of God to this world.

He left his cell saying, “This is the end—but for me, the beginning of life.”³ They could kill his body, but they could not stop his worship.

Unstoppable worshippers are bold evangelists, lifting up the name of Jesus everywhere they get a chance. Their offerings of worship are just as vibrant outside the walls of the church as they are inside. They are adventurous hearts, taking every opportunity to demonstrate the good news of God to this world. In chains for doing just that, the apostle Paul urged the Church in Ephesus:

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth,
words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make

known the mystery of the gospel. . . . Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (Ephesians 6:19,20).

Here was a man in prison again for proclaiming Jesus. His boldness had gotten him arrested, and common sense would have said, “Pray that I keep my mouth shut next time.” Instead he prays for more boldness! Paul’s mission in life was to make his glorious Jesus known; if that stirred up trouble for him, then so be it.

If the apostle Paul needed to pray for more boldness, how much more do we? I’ve always found it very easy to lift up Jesus in the context of church but very hard to find opportunities—and take them—outside. Putting it bluntly, I can be a complete coward! At the age of 16, I used to wear a cross lapel badge on my school uniform. If I’m honest, I think I was pretty proud of myself; that is, until the day I applied for a Saturday job at my local bike store. Just before the interview I took the badge off, hiding it away in my pocket—just in case wearing it would ruin my chances of getting the job. In the middle of the interview I suddenly realized what I’d done, and I felt so ashamed. There I sat with the cross in my pocket, wondering how I could ever be embarrassed by what Jesus had done for me.

The only other job I've ever had is working for the church, and of course I had been a lot keener to wear my cross badge for that interview! But isn't that what many of us are like? We'll carry the cross high at church and then hide it away in our pockets when we go out into the rest of life. I learned a lesson that day. I need to line up with the apostle Paul for some more Holy Spirit boldness. If I can't even carry a little cross lapel badge, how on earth am I going to manage a real one?

I recently heard the story of Rachel Scott, a teenage victim of the Columbine High School tragedy in Denver, Colorado. It's another powerful tale of unstoppable worship. On April 20, 1999, two bitter and twisted students entered the grounds of the school with guns and explosives, planning to wreak havoc. One of the grudges they were bearing was against Christians, and when they found Rachel Scott, that grudge was made very clear. The killers shot her twice in the legs and once in the upper body. As she struggled to crawl away to safety, they pulled her up by the hair and asked, "Do you believe in God?" They thought they'd won the battle, expecting her to back down from her faith with a whimpering "No." But this bleeding, unstoppable worshipper bravely affirmed, "You know I do." Furious with that answer,

they yelled, “Then go be with him!” and shot her right through the head.⁴

Imagine the heart of God in that moment when one of His precious worshippers threw her life on the line for His glory. In a gruesome moment of decision, she chose His honor over her own survival. This story stirs my heart every time I hear it. And if it affects us so much, imagine what effect it must have on the heart of Jesus.

The story of Stephen’s stoning in Acts 7 sheds more light on this. He put his life on the line, proclaiming Jesus to cold hearts that didn’t want to hear and rebuking them for their religious pride. But just before they stoned him to death, God allowed Stephen an amazing depth of revelation—perhaps to help this first Christian martyr stay strong to the end. Stephen was allowed a glimpse of heaven’s throne room and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The odd thing here is that Jesus was standing. Every other time in the New Testament when we hear of Jesus at the right hand of God, He’s sitting down. So why is He standing now?

He may not have been the world’s greatest theologian, but I love Smith Wigglesworth’s explanation:

Though usually seated at the right hand of God, this time Jesus gets to His feet to honor and spur Stephen

on in his courageous act of worship. It's as if He's saying "Look up, look up! You have honored me today, and forever I will be your very great reward. I am on my feet to spur you on. Look up to me, look up to me, for your brave worship has brought honor to my name and pleasure to my heart."⁵

While walking this Earth, Jesus Himself lived out unstoppable acts of devotion toward the heart of His Father. The Cross, of course, is the ultimate expression of this; but in the week leading up to the Crucifixion, we find another powerful example. Jesus and His disciples were just finishing the Last Supper, which would have been a Passover meal. In the Passover tradition, a number of hymns were sung, the last of which was probably Psalm 136, "The Great Hallel."⁶ Mark's Gospel tells us, "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Mark 14:26). So it's very likely this hymn was Psalm 136. The psalm begins,

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.
to him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures forever.
who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.
who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever (vv. 1-6).

The rest of the psalm carries on in much the same way. By the end of it the phrase “His love endures forever” has appeared 26 times. Think about that for a minute. Judas’s betrayal is knocking loudly at the door. The garden of Gethsemane is beckoning. The shadow of the Cross falls right across this meal, and yet Jesus can declare 26 times, “His love endures forever.” It’s amazing that even in this dark, dark hour His devotion to the Father will not be broken. His heart of worship refuses to be intimidated. Doesn’t that teach us something about worship?

Unstoppable worshippers let nothing hinder them in their quest to glorify God. Whatever “goliaths” come their way, they walk out onto that worship battlefield and take their chances. They do not shrink back in times of trouble, but instead raise a spirited psalm of trust and praise.