

Invincible

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Date: 05 March 2023

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[0 : 0 0] about 15 years ago a friend of mine was so moved by a book that she bought a copy for me and my whole family it was called the last lecture by randy pausch it was a powerhouse people talk about the world just laying open for them and and randy was that guy he was extraordinarily gifted worked extraordinarily hard and he arrived when he wrote the book he seemed like he was on top of the world with work and with family he was the professor of computer science at human computer science human computer interaction and design at carnegie mellon mellon university he was an award-winning teacher and researcher he worked with adobe google electronic arts walt disney and pioneered a non-profit to support youth and computer technology on the home front he was married he had three young boys to many including himself his life looked like a dream and at 46 he was excited and looking forward to what the next half of life would hold at that time randy was diagnosed with cancer he had the best medical care that was available but the treatments were ineffective and the doctors told him that he had three maybe six months of relative health left and then his body would decline rapidly and he would die it was a jarring and heartbreaking diagnosis not just for the loss of what he had built but perhaps even more for what he had left to give the future he spent his life for wasn't going to happen and so what did he do he did the best thing that he knew how he tried to make the most of that three months as a husband father and professor he gave his limited health to what he hoped might most endure he stepped back from regular teaching at the university and gave time to his family and especially his last lecture a last lecture if you're not familiar with it and i am not in this community and what it was not that familiar with it either but in academia it's a commonplace activity it's when a retiring professor gives their final instruction to their students they're generally great it's like a mini magnum opus of all the most important and profound bits of wisdom that they've gathered over their career their life randy's came much earlier than expected but he handled it much differently too instead of words of wisdom for students and colleagues his were to his not old enough really to comprehend what was going on he wanted to give them a way to learn from their father after he could no longer be with them as it turns out randy's lecture struck a chord with many it was recorded turned into a book and was a viral publishing sensation people passed his story on just like that friend did to me and they wanted more more of his wisdom they wanted to see a miraculous recovery but a very short time later randy passed away what do you think you would do it's not easy to answer sometimes we don't have the time to think about it like randy did some of you probably remember the recent bills versus bangles game it was early in the first quarter when bill's safety demar hamlin made an extraordinary tackle he got back up and he immediately fell straight back down almost instantly players coaches and fans realized that something was wrong players gathered around the roaring stadium fell to an eerie whisper

and announcers cut to commercial break after commercial break no one said it out loud but it was clear that we were all wondering the same thing are we witnessing the healthiest one of the healthiest people on the planet in the prime of his life living his dream die on national tv as time went on hours and then days we came to find out that demar had suffered a cardiac arrest as cardiac arrests go his chance of survival was 10 percent there was a 90 percent chance that he would die millions watched as this elite human being laid helpless on full life support on a hospital bed fortunately demar was one of the 10 percent he came out of the coma and is recovering surprisingly well the point is no matter how strong we are how well we're doing how much more we have to give we are fragile as paul puts it later on in this very letter we are like jars of clay hard pressed on every side the problem is we don't really handle our fragility very well for the most part we try to ignore it we don't wear the rose-colored glasses and feign invincibility we are tough but it doesn't work no matter how hard we try the truth keeps poking holes in our delusion on the physical side

every day we get a little older some of you know better this experience than others at a certain point we don't run as fast we don't lift as much our bones hurt those six-pack abs they fade and so does our vision so does our memory thankfully and on the mental side it's worse every one of our personal histories is fraught with anxiety temptation and failure in the face of our anxiety we shrink back from what we ought to do and in the face of our temptations we give way in fact the more obvious our fragility becomes the weakness becomes our inability to control our circumstances the more seriously we look for relief or escape in any form that we can find it even if that's escape from life itself and this is where God meets us in Paul's confession to the Corinthians in verse 8 he says for we do not want you to be unaware brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself now I think our first impulse hearing a story like that from anyone is to ask what happened that had to be so bad and especially if it drove Paul to this point

I mean Paul's no stranger to suffering in chapter 11 in this very letter this is what he says in just chapter 11 five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one three times I was beaten with rods once I was stoned three times I was shipwrecked a night and a day I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys in danger from rivers danger from robbers danger from my own people danger from Gentiles danger in the city danger in the wilderness danger at sea danger from false brothers in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst often without food and cold and exposure and apart from other things there's the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches so what what in the world happened and yet Paul he doesn't tell us the case specific details here and I think that's on purpose we're not supposed to be able to distance ourselves too far from his experience the bigger deal is that Paul felt like he had been pushed so far beyond what he could handle that he despaired and that's something that's meant to resonate with all of us so what's despair?

John MacArthur broke it down this way and this was one of the most helpful explanations to me he said the word he said the root word in the Greek is porous which means passage and that together with the prefix de means no passage it's to say there is no exit there's no way out it's to be so overwhelmed physically or mentally that you let go or release your grip on life it's an awful space it's like drowning some think of that as the most horrendous way to die there's thrashing and then eventually your strength is overcome your inability to do anything about it and you slowly sink below the water and you stop fighting and you let go but when we think about it in the life of Paul it seems worse if not unfathomable for a big extra here

Paul is no ordinary man he's a Christian of Christians a pastor to the pastors he was called and set apart by God to be an apostle inspired by the Holy Spirit to write much of the New Testament and bring the gospel to the known world if you're looking for someone that really understands the gospel who really gets how it connects to life and practice Paul is that guy more than any other guy and so Paul's despair is certainly that his own strength is gone but it would seem that he's also wrestling with that unutterable voice of doubt that maybe his God's strength is gone or at least insufficient for this task and so what does he do well he lets go but God doesn't it's right here when Paul is at the end of himself when he's convinced that he's received the sentence of death that all that he had envisioned yet to do on this earth that he felt that God had called him to do was going to get cut short that he lets go and finds anew that his God knows his God is there is sufficient for the task and more and more for as Paul describes it it wasn't an accident that he found himself in this place it was according to God's purpose his design his God is in charge here at the doorstep of the end of his life too he says verse 9 but that was to make us

[11 : 29] God made us that was to make us rely not on ourselves but God and specifically the God who raises the dead and that point is just as noteworthy you see death is the ultimate trump card for life for instance what's your heart's desire money security love children island paradise not today we're just suspended in disbelief it's not possible and it sounds good right I mean a whole lot of problems go away happy life our heart's desire has been found but there's a catch it will cost you your life well in that case well it's not such a good deal right in fact it's instantly a no deal if we can't have that stuff with life then what's the point but you see if God is the God who raises the dead who's thereby unnecessarily stronger than death then not only can he deliver us from the ultimate trump card on our life he can deliver us everything less than death and that's the realization that infuses

Paul with a supernatural vitality a bold sense of almost invincibility as he continues in verse 10 he says he delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again I love that it's a boldness that doesn't just live life intentionally so as to make the most out of the time that we have which we should all do but it is future focused past death in such a way that death is not our ultimate end in other words Paul has gained such a sure confidence in the preserving care and power of his invincible God that he doesn't fear the loss of anything even his life because he knows his God is able and has determined to return it a hundredfold and more in the next as Paul put it in his letter to the Philippians indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord or perhaps even more to the point in 1 Peter blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading in other words not only will God deliver us from such a death but in Christ he will give us all things more than money can buy more love more beauty more than an island paradise more security than Cheyenne mountain bunker and all that without loss or fading forever and so what's next well Paul says verse 11 go forth and conquer not exactly he says you must help us by prayer when I read that I said what with such a renewed sense of vigor and energy why prayer because you see we can't help but pray when we're forced to rely not on ourselves but on God that's one of the beautiful parts of

Damar Hamlin in that incident it was a surreal moment even watching it on TV for some unexplained unexpected whatever when this perfectly healthy giant of a human being collapsed on the ground a quick sobriety fell across every player coach referee fan and spectator and do you know what they did it happened so fast so instinctively it was like it was choreographed but it wasn't they all got down on a knee they bowed their heads and they prayed and an NFL stadium broadcast on live television became a giant revival church it was like they knew what to do when they knew there was nothing that they could do and so what is Paul really showing us here well at the most basic level when Paul came face to face with the end of himself and a certain sentence of death he saw

Christ and through him he gained a renewed confidence in his invincible God you see as fragile people we have an instinctive drive to protect ourselves it's our survival instinct it's why we invest in safe cars friendly neighborhoods savings fitness and nutrition and that's obviously not all bad but sometimes we confuse these things as our security or as invoking us with independent autonomy and invincibility on the other hand we find in Christ this wonder for he had real invincibility and immortality and he exchanged that for fragility and mortality and then when he was faced with the prospect of certain death he didn't turn to self-reliance self-protectionism anxiety or giving way to the temptation for relief and escape but through prayer he entrusted himself into the hands of his father in his dying breath he said father into your hands

[17 : 29] I commit my spirit and his father the invincible God who raises the dead raised him from the dead and so what difference does this make well first let's return to Randy from the perspective of this world Randy was a great man and there's truly much to respect in him he handled the reality of death with a lot of grace and maturity but from a Christian perspective as I read that book there was a glaring omission in his last lecture and he knew it it was on purpose even joked about it he said this is not about religion or spirituality or a deathbed conversion and then his joke though I did buy a Macintosh which is must have been a PC guy you see for Randy death was it there was no God in this life in his life and therefore there was no after this life and that obviously had a profound effect on how he lived his life from his perspective life was about how much you could get for as long as you could get it it was about realizing childhood dreams it was carpe diem seize the day and there's there's right stuff about some of those perspectives we should strive to make the most of everyday waste is sinful but if tomorrow and eternal life are a certainty then what we do today isn't as much about today as it is about an eternal tomorrow and so what do we take away from this in the renewed confidence that God is that God knows that he has the power and will take care of us in death and everything less than that we need to live our lives more out of faith in his care than our own it's the difference between approaching life from the perspective of fragility and temporality versus invincibility and immortality imagine that before you are two doors it's like on the price is right on the top of the the left door your left it says why oh you you inside is a short and fragile life it's whatever you can get for as long as you can get it it's all up to you and after a little while you die it's how the animals live on top of the door on the right it says h-i-m him inside that door is an

all-powerful and personal heavenly father he loves you he did not even withhold his only son to rescue you behind that door it's not all about you but it is good for you and ultimately everything there depends not on you but him and finally he loves you so much that he will not withhold everything that is good and it will never ever end and so which do you choose the right door is so much better than it all depends on you and yet even as

Christians even when we know even after we profess we know the door on the right is better is real and the door on the left is a lie and even worse than it looks and worse than it looks we drift again and that's what Paul is trying to show us here it's not that the Christian life is going to be easy we all know it isn't but that our invincible God has more power than the hardest it can be and therefore everything less than that as well as a result in Christ there is strength not just to be wise stewards of the time we have on this earth to make the most of it but to boldly prayerfully and faithfully keep striving to follow after Christ to keep taking step after step even through pain fear and uncertainty even through the valley of the shadow of death because our future does not ultimately depend on our strength but his as

Jesus told his disciples in the gospel of John in the world you will have trouble but take overcome the world and as Paul puts it a little later in this letter this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison and therefore if you're not a Christian today consider the difference between your left door it all depends on me delusion and the right door a true reality that God offers everyone that will come to him in Christ choose Christ and if you're a Christian be renewed like Paul in the confidence that our invisible God is faithful he delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again let's pray dear almighty

God Lord thank you for your word thank you that you are the God who raises the dead Lord would you please strengthen our faith give us boldness not because of some power that we have but because you have all power Lord there is nothing in this world that you cannot remedy and so give us strength in that Lord to follow after you with boldness in Jesus name we pray amen