

Excerpts from: "Live Free"

Galatians 1:11-24

He's back. **Bruce Willis** will return this week as wisecracking police officer John McLane in the fourth Die Hard movie, a franchise that was launched in 1988 and has made more than \$700 million so far. Although you might think that Willis is past his prime in the action hero department, **Sylvester Stallone** recently returned to the ring as Rocky Balboa, and did you know that **Harrison Ford** is picking up his whip again as Indiana Jones.

Live Free. Or Die Hard. That's the name of the new Bruce Willis movie, hitting theaters later this month.

In this new movie, Willis will attempt to stop a techno-terrorist who is determined to shut down the nation's computer systems on the Fourth of July. The threat is put in place to take down the entire computer structure that supports the economy of the United States - and the world. The villain will be high-tech in this new Die Hard flick, but Willis will offer a low-tech response.

In other words, he'll use his fists.

The Bruce Willis character "will be doing what he does best," says the director of the movie - "being a huge pain" to the bad guys.

You might think of the apostle Paul as the Bruce Willis of the New Testament. He follows a "die hard" approach to life, and takes his knocks as a lone hero standing up to the forces of evil. He gets beat up and bloodied, flogged and imprisoned - but he never gives up. "Three times I was beaten with rods," he tells the Corinthians. "Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. ... [I faced] danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters" (2 Corinthians 11:25-26).

He's determined to live free. Or die hard.

Like the Bruce Willis action hero, the apostle **Paul has some skeletons in his closet.** The first Die Hard movie begins with Willis fighting with his estranged wife over the details of their separation. In a similar way, today's passage from Galatians starts with Paul admitting that his own personal past is anything but perfect. ".I intensely persecuted the church of God and was trying to destroy it," he admits, as he looks back (Galatians 1:13). "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age, for I was intensely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (v. 14). In his zeal, Paul breathed threats and murder against the members of the Christian church, and set off for the city of Damascus to capture any Christians who might be there.

But on that trip, God reveals his Son Jesus to Paul, and calls him to proclaim Christ among the non-Jews of the world, the Gentiles (v. 16). This conversion launches Paul's career as a Christian action hero, and he spreads the gospel on a number of missionary adventures. "I did not confer with any human being," he tells the Galatians. Paul was 'blinded by the light' on his way to Damascus. He seems determined to play the Bruce Willis role: **one man against the world.**

After three years, he ventured into the regions of Syria and Cilicia , where he is unknown except by his reputation. The Christians there heard it said, "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me (v. 23,24).

Paul is always a bit of a mystery man, just like Bruce Willis in the Die Hard movies.

"Who are you?" asks the villain in the first installment. "Just another American who saw too many movies as a child? Another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne? Rambo? Marshall Dillon?"

"Was always kinda' partial to Roy Rogers actually," replies McLane. "I really dig those sequined shirts."

"Do you really think you have a chance against us, Mister Cowboy?" asks the villain.

Willis delivers his famous line, "Yippee-ki-yay," in a mocking response. Well, Paul delivers a message that is as surprising and unorthodox as anything in a Die Hard movie. He says that he cannot be made right with God through works of the law - **only faith in Christ will do that.**

He says that he is now dead to the law, and alive to God through his relationship with Jesus. "I have been crucified with Christ," he writes to the Galatians; "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:19 -20).

Paul is insisting that he has already died - he has been crucified with Christ. But after losing his old life, he has been given a new one. Christ now lives in him, and Paul finds himself living by faith in the Son of God, the one who loved him and gave himself for him.

Paul has died hard - and now he lives free.

- Dead to the law.
- Crucified with Christ.
- Living by faith.
- Alive to God.
- A whole new life.
- **Yippee-ki-yay!**

But what does it mean for us to live a **dead-to-the-law, alive-to-God, crucified-with-Christ, living-by-faith kind of Christian life today?** It might feel like a stretch for us to do this, because most of us are more comfortable with clear rules and regulations, guidebooks and checklists. But Paul is challenging us to join him on the unpredictable adventure of Christian living, one in which we put faith in Christ above any works of the law or our flesh. You've been crucified with Christ, insists Paul, and Christ is living in you.

So live! Live free! Listen. To live a life of Christian freedom is to discover that Jesus Christ is at work inside you. There is a fascinating footnote to Paul's conversion story that is often missed when we read the first chapter of Galatians.

Initially, in the English translation of the Bible, Paul says in verse 16 that God was pleased "to reveal his Son to me," a line that makes us think of Paul's encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus .

But that's not really what he says. In the original Greek of the letter, Paul says that God was pleased "to reveal his Son in me." Not **TO** me... **IN** me.

Now, that's interesting.

Paul is saying that God was pleased to reveal his Son in and through Paul himself. God has decided to use the apostle Paul to present the risen Christ to the world. Now this might sound like a bold and audacious claim - "Step aside, God is using me to carry Christ to the world!" - but it certainly fits with the overall thrust of Paul's mission.

As noted earlier, he says, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:20). He urges the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ

(1 Corinthians 11:1). And he talks about all of us "being transformed into the same image" - the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Don't think of Christian life as adherence to a bunch of rules and regulations, says Paul. Think of it as a life of **presenting Christ to the world**. Within that life of carrying Jesus to others, there is tremendous freedom.

For some of you, presenting Christ will mean:

- telling a friend about how you see God at work.
- For others, it will mean leading in prayer, or sharing a word in a service of worship.
- For others, mentoring a young person in the process of discipleship.
- For others, counseling the hurting, lonely and spiritually bankrupt.
- For others, joining a short-term mission trip to a developing country.
- For others, participating in a spiritual growth group.
- For others, welcoming a new family into our congregation.

The list goes on and on, because there are countless ways to carry Jesus to others. It pleases God to reveal his Son in you, so now you can live free - and present Jesus to others in a wide, wild and wonderful variety of ways!

When we move into this life of freedom, we realize that we are no longer in charge. We discover that our choices are now shaped by the presence of Christ, and we are being guided by Jesus into new forms of service.

Christian freedom is not permission to do anything we want - **instead, it is freedom to do what Jesus wants**. We have been freed from captivity to sin and senseless living so that we can be free to serve the Lord who loves us and gave his life for us.

When Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus , he also received a commission. Likewise, we too have a commission and that is to what?

GO! We could paraphrase Christ's command and say, "**Go into the world and be the gospel to every person.**"

So, how are you living free? How and where are you going? How is Christ being lived out in you? In your life, who you really are? Where is Christ being shared in your vocation, in your relationships?

Do you remember your Damascus road experience? How has your encounter with the risen Christ changed your life?

A YWAM representative shared with me this story of a mission team of basketball players who experienced the life-changing power of the gospel firsthand while working in a village in Ghana . They were trying to hold a Sunday morning service, but it was too light to show the *Jesus* film they had planned to show, and no one on the team spoke the local dialect. So as the villagers gathered, the students searched for a translator and found a young guy who spoke English. He agreed to translate, and as a member of the basketball team shared the message of freedom in Christ, a large crowd began to form.

What the team didn't know was that their translator was a local gangster! The villagers were coming to find out why this notorious thug was talking about God. When the student speaker ended the message with an invitation, the translator added a challenge of his own. "I want all of you to know that I have decided to ask Jesus Christ into my life," he announced. "I am going to come forward, and I *recommend* that you do the same."

Seeing God's power to change even a notorious gangster prompted many people to accept Christ that morning. The unlikely evangelist served as translator for the rest of the team's trip and became a member and leader of the nearby church.

Jesus died hard, so that we can live free. **Yippee-ki-yay!**