

Encouragement

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Good Morning Friend,

Just weeks ago on February 1, 2003, the American Space program suffered its third fatal disaster as seven astronauts died in flight. It happened at 8:00 on a Saturday morning, just sixteen minutes before its intended landing in Florida. The space shuttle, Columbia, had traveled six million miles in sixteen days and was close to home . . . but it didn't make it safely back to earth. A catastrophic explosion tore the shuttle apart about 200,000 feet (38 miles) above Texas. Thousands of pieces of the shuttle and human body parts rained fragments to earth. The accident was a huge tragedy for the families of the victims . . . for NASA . . . and for the United States.

Since the accident, many touching human stories have surfaced. There were at least two committed Christians on the flight: Rick Husband and Michael Anderson. Shortly before the flight Michael was talking with a friend. The friend expressed concern, fear, and uncertainty about the entire flight experience to Michael. He responded, *If something severe happens, don't worry about me. At that moment I will be going higher yet.*

On the evening before the flight, Commander Husband gathered the seven astronauts and their families together. He read the following Scriptures to them, taken from Joshua 1:5-9. It contains a part of God's charter to Joshua as he embarked on a difficult assignment. The passage includes the following as God talks to Joshua.

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law . . . Have not I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

How fitting! How appropriate! The same God who spoke to Joshua at the start of a tough assignment was now talking with the seven astronauts at the start of their difficult and uncertain journey. Often I have preached this portion to Christians on assignment in difficult places. It is a great text for each of us to carry with us daily. The text includes:

- **A CALL TO OBEDIENCE**, potently stated in verses 7-8.
- **A CHALLENGE TO COURAGE**. Three times in the complete text, God says . . . *Be strong*

and courageous. In Him, we find strength and courage. We need not be wimps. Not losers. Not quitters. Not victims . . . but victors.

- **A REMINDER OF GOD'S PRESENCE** (verses 5 and 9). *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* (Verse 5, and later in Hebrews 13:5). The last phrase of verse 9 is so good to ponder . . . *the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.* That's right . . . **WHEREVER?** Yes, even into outer space.
- **TWO ADMONITIONS** (in verse 9) . . . *don't be terrified and don't be discouraged.* These two tendencies are still around, aren't they? And God addresses them in both the Old and the New Testaments. We don't need to be shackled with them any longer.

As I read this paragraph of Scripture, I thank God that He spoke these words to Joshua, and often re-stated them elsewhere in the Bible for His people to hear and heed. These words helped prepare the astronauts for their flight and I am convinced that these words were written on their hearts during the flight and at the moment of unexpected tragedy.

When the pastor and rabbi spoke at the Memorial Service in Texas, they read Psalm 23, both in Hebrew and in English. One year earlier President Bush, on the night of 9/11, read the same passage to the nation from the Oval Office. The fourth verse of that Psalm was especially pertinent in both settings . . . *Even though I walk through the **valley of the shadow of death**, I will fear no evil for you are with me.* Such a pertinent text for David (at the time of writing), for a nervous nation (on 9/11), for astronauts and their families . . . for you and me as we face this day and tomorrow.

Be encouraged,

Lareau Lindquist