

June 7, 2020

The Illusion of Defeat



**Luke 10:25-37**

**25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**26 “What is written in the Law?”he replied. “How do you read it?”**

**27 He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

**28 “You have answered correctly,”Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”**

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii

35 A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

**Special Music:**

**Rescuer - Rend Collective**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wCfHXgJbdg>

**Rescue Story - Zach Williams**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybCOOCaHp5c>

**On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy addressed congress with a speech that challenged the all the resources, imagination and spirit of the American People beyond comprehension. At the time, the United States of America was focused on preventing the spread of communism, the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement, the advent of rock and roll, the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles with integration. It was the year that Scott Baio, Barack Obama, Peter Jackson, George Clooney and Michael J. Fox were born. I really have a hard time believing that I am older than those guys. The average cost of a new home was \$12,500 and the income of the average household was \$5,315. The cost of a gallon of gas was 27 cents.**

**At this time in history, the U.S. budget was already strained, and inflation was making its presence known in grocery stores. "The Absent-Minded Professor," "101 Dalmations" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's" were kings on the big screen while "Wagon Train", "Bonanza", "Gunsmoke", "The Red Skelton Show", "Perry Mason", and "Andy Griffith" had viewers riveted to their televisions.**

**Kennedy's speech drew our attention away from those things that we thought mattered so much in our daily existence and forced us to focus on the future, a new challenge, a challenge greater than any country on this planet had ever even conceived of. He skipped planting seeds and jumped right to planting roots of commitment. These are the words he spoke to congress:**

**“First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.”**

**The challenge was beyond belief. The challenge was beyond the boundaries of logic. The challenge was argued and debated by every person in America. Only an American President would ever openly express such a wild vision and put a deadline on it. And the American people accepted the challenge and the race was on. They believed in the president. They believed in the tenacity of the American people. They believed in the dream. A dream that pushed the limits the Mercury and Gemini programs as the we rushed into the Apollo program, headstrong and driven. A dream that could not be stopped. We were Americans and we could do anything we set our minds to. We were the greatest country on the planet, and nothing could quash our dreams or our sense of accomplishment.**

**The reality of the deadline raised it head in mockery. Corners were cut, labor was rushed, safety checks ignored, compromises were made in materials, and engineering protocols and limitations were abandoned. The goal became far more precious than the arbitrary deadline of the end of the decade, set by the vision of a president that would not live to see that vision accomplished.**

**And on Friday, January 27, 1967, our dream of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth, withered on the vine along with the lives of the first three Apollo astronauts, Ed White, Gus Grissom and Roger Chaffee. In a horrific accident that echoed our lack of foresight and cloudy vision, a tribute to our hubris and impatience, a fire broke out in the command module of Apollo 1 and within 30 seconds the capsule was totally engulfed in flames. Seventeen seconds into the fire, all communication with the capsule and its occupants ceased. Frayed wiring, a 100% oxygen mix, the choice to remove the explosive safety bolts to blow the hatch, the choice to have the hatch open inward instead of outward, the choice to use highly combustible materials in the spacecraft itself, all came this together in a magnificent testimony to our arrogance and our overconfidence. Although they worked valiantly to try and save the crew, it took the ground crew over five minutes to remove that hatch, only to find that the astronauts had passed in the first thirty seconds of the inferno.**

**I say that this tragedy falls on all of our shoulders because we, as a people, allowed ourselves to believe that the timeline for meeting the goal by the end of the decade was more important than the goal itself. WE, as a people, allowed the arbitrary deadline, to push us into making mistakes because we were only looking at the finish line and not at the process that would take us there. We did not allow ourselves the flexibility to get it right. I was only twelve years old, with stars in my eyes, and I remember that day like it was yesterday.**

**Three very brave men, died. And to heap ashes on their deaths, the dream was all but dead. People pointed fingers. There were calls to terminate the space program, to kill NASA without recourse. We wanted to blame someone – the engineers, the scientists, the administrators, and the politicians. But the truth was, we were all to blame. Our own fervor only added to the pressure faced by NASA to get this job done at any cost; to meet our goal no matter who paid the ultimate price. And the families of these brave men payed that price for our ignorance, irresponsibility and lack of accountability.**

**Maybe I sound unduly harsh, but when I was young, that is all I wanted to be. An astronaut. To explore the unknown bounds of this universe. The child that I was, saw that dream die that day along with those men in that tiny 6 cubic foot space capsule.**

**Many people still believe that the dream should have died that day, that NASA should have been shut down completely, that the plug should have been pulled and the resources reallocated. But I have told you numerous times that the view looking back is different from the clouded view of looking forward. Looking back is etched in stone. It's history. Looking forward always requires faith, trust and hope working hand in hand to push our drive for accomplishment.**

**The truth is that defeat is often an illusion, a perceived outcome based on limited perspective. We see the darkness surround us and think that the darkness is all encompassing, that it is never meant to see light. We make a conscious choice to accept that darkness rather than embrace the possibility of hope, that something good can come from the supposed defeat, something greater than the original vision. It might be a new path, or the redemption and reaffirmation of the original vision, bringing it back in from the darkness and into the light.**

**The man who gave us the vision of putting a man on the moon had been assassinated several years earlier. The vision, though, had not died with him. Sometimes, a vision takes on a life of its own and transcends its creator. Such was the nature of this vision. The horrible tragedy of Apollo 1 showed us, as a nation, our hubris attitude and enough people believed that the problems we faced were not just technical in nature, they were flaws in our character as a people. Realizing that, the dream was reborn out of the ashes of that tragedy, and new safety protocols and procedures were put into place. The need for greater oversight was acknowledged and new restraints, conditions and parameters, and protocols were inaugurated. The dream did not die with the tragedy, even though there were so many that thought it should. And on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped from the Lunar Module Eagle onto the moon's surface declaring "One small step for man. One giant leap for mankind." The vision had become a reality, the accomplishment a legacy.**



What does any of this have to do with the story of The Good Samaritan? When I read scripture, I struggle to find new insight. When reading the story again, I realized that so very often, when we read or study the story of The Good Samaritan, we focus on the characters that pass by this dying man without really looking at this dying man.

We don't really know much about this man except that he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked and beaten by robbers and left half dead. We often forget that this is a story that Jesus told in answer to the question, **“And who is my neighbor?”**, a question asked by a religious legal expert trying to test Jesus and discover a loophole. We get caught up in the fact that the dying man is ignored by the priest and the Levite, but then is helped by the despised Samaritan. We often assume that the dying man is a Jew because he is going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and in all honesty, it seems to make a better story if we believe he is a Jew because of the animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews. But there were a lot of people of different nationalities and cultures that visited Jerusalem. Jesus doesn't tell us the nationality of the dying man. Why do you think that is?

The answer is really, pretty simple. It doesn't matter. The nationality, profession, skin color, religion or wealth just do not matter. The condition of the man is so severe, a person might not have been able to determine that anyway. The only

thing that matters, is that the man will die if he doesn't receive help. He probably isn't in any kind of condition to ask for help. He may be unconscious and bleeding. What we do know is that he has been left to die. Just like our dream of putting a man on the moon. The conditions are beyond hopeless. Unless someone intervenes, it's all over. The man is not going to be able to pick himself up and go find help. The man is going to die and he probably knows it.

Imagine what it must have been like for this beaten, dying man when he woke up in a clean bed with food to eat, clothes to wear and his wounds bound. Imagine coming from such a profound sense of loss, that the man had accepted the fact that he would soon be dead, where he had given up hope as person after person passed him by and ignored his plight; where the light of hope had gone away and been replaced by extreme pain and total darkness. Imagine how he might have given into his inevitable fate; only to wake up and find a world where someone, he had no idea who, had reached out and made a difference, had taken care of his needs, had put him on the road to recovery and had even covered the costs associated with that recovery. As cruel as the robbers had been, someone had gone above and beyond to be kind. Can you place yourself in his shoes? Can you imagine waking to a new day when you had already accepted that a new day was not possible?

We are all in search of a heroes. Heroes are not extraordinary men and women doing extraordinary things. That is a pedestal we put them on. When someone else does something good that we can't or won't, we label them as heroes. Heroes are common, ordinary people who, in spite of their circumstances, conditions and the threat to their personal well being, reach out to fulfill a need. People who place the needs of others above their own. People who see people the way that Jesus sees people. Not their skin color, not their philosophy, not their religion, not the color of their hair or their eyes, not their age, not their cultural heritage, not the state of their clothing or their current condition in life, not based on their life choices or where they sleep. Heroes are people that see people in need and meet that need without prejudice or prequalification. We need to stop looking for heroes. Because the heroes of this planet are us. As disciples, it is our duty and responsibility to meet the needs of the people that we encounter.

Dr. Robert Schuller once said, **“Anybody who succeeds is helping people. The secret to success is find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it; find a problem and solve it.”** As heroes, we are to look for solutions to problems, sometimes problems that nobody else sees. We need to look for needs to fill and hurts to heal. And sometimes that requires us to stand in harm's way.

**God may not be asking us to run into burning buildings, or quell a riot, but he is asking for us to meet the needs of our fellow human beings when we see them. And he wants us to do it unconditionally with no expectation of return. Jesus wants us to see the people around us through His eyes so that we can see the beauty in their lives when others only see problems, pain and darkness. Jesus exemplified that lifestyle. He always solved the problems of the people he encountered before he asked them to repent of their sins.**

**A few weeks ago, we talked about Tabitha and how her true story was not the story of her resurrection, but the way that she met the needs of the people around her. I want to repeat something that I said in that sermon because it is such an important point. “She understood that good works were not the gate to salvation but the result of the grace of salvation. Because Jesus loved her, she could love others.” We can’t earn our way into heaven, though most of us try anyway. The gift of salvation is free. Romans 6:23 says, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** There is no way to work, buy or barter our way into heaven. But if we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, he will give us the desire through the holy spirit to be a hero in the lives of our neighbors, not to shine a light on our own achievements, but to shine a light on the source of our strength which enables us to bring new life and salvation to those around us. That allows us to feed, clothe, lift, and love people in that same way that Jesus loves them. To point the way to Jesus through love and grace.**

**The dying man on the road may never have known who his savior was. From the Samaritan's standpoint, it really did not matter. The only person that really knew of the heroic efforts of the Samaritan was the innkeeper. It was only necessary for the innkeeper to be privy to the secret so that the needs of the beaten man could continue to be met. The Samaritan saw a need and he filled it. He saw a hurt and he healed it. His compassion was for a child of God in need of assistance. The grace that he exhibited was toward his "neighbor" even though he had no idea who that man was.**

**Faith gives way to vision and vision breeds more vision. The space program almost died on that day in 1967. But it didn't. And today we are entering a new era where that vision has evolved. We are watching the unfolding of a new vision of privatization of space travel. Just as there was a point of disbelief that any government would ever be able to tackle the monumental task of putting a man on the moon, just a few short years ago no one believed that a private company could ever achieve putting a man into space. A vision that would not have been possible if we had allowed that dream, that dream of putting that man on the moon, to die.**

**As Christians, we need to learn that what we think of as defeat, is really a part of God's process. By doing so, we can find gratitude for those moments when we feel less than successful in our attempts to do what is expected of us.**

**God doesn't lose. God's plan never gets shut down. God's plan is never underfunded. God's plan is never behind schedule. His timing is impeccable. We assume that God's plan is only as big as our own human vision. When we limit ourselves and our view of God's plan in that way, it causes us to forget that God doesn't color inside of the lines, that his plan is limitless and exceeds our purview. What we see as defeat is only an illusion and is actually a step in the advancement of His plan. He may be bringing new resources to the plan. He may be moving us in a different direction. He may be encouraging others to stand hand in hand with us. He may be providing a new location, or restructuring the vision to better meet His needs. We need to allow God to speak into us and show us our part in His vision as He intended it to be. We need to admit to ourselves that we have a part to play in God's plan. That He enables us to perform in a needed capacity. What we are not called to do, is to sit on the sidelines.**

**If we decide that we are not capable, do not have the resources, are not qualified, are not justified in helping our neighbors, we are taking our God out of the equation. We need to constantly come into His presence so that He can provide us with His vision of how we fit into that plan. So that we can continue to meet the needs of our community and our neighbors, without prejudice and without regard to our reward. "Open the eyes of our heart, Lord. Open the eyes of our heart."**

**God forges men for his service through our perceived defeats and accomplishments. He uses them to build character in each of us, so that we can be the tools that He needs in His service. He uses those events and the people He puts in our lives, to hone us to sharpness, to enable us. “Iron Sharpens Iron”. There should be no resentment in the sharpening process, only a willingness to be sharpened, and then to serve in whatever capacity he places us in.**

**This week, let us all look deep within ourselves and find those places, people and events that God has used to make us His tools. Let us be thankful for our perceived defeats knowing that there is a purpose there, purpose that forwards the Kingdom of God, even if we never see the big picture. Let us put our faith into trusting God, knowing that what he is doing is using the Illusion of our defeat to lift others and fit the puzzle pieces of our lives into the overall plan that only God can see. Let us begin each day by dropping the pain of our past, our moments of darkness, our sins and our perceived defeats at the foot of the cross for Jesus to use to His glory.**

**AMEN**

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