

"THE CAGE OF FAILURE"

Acts 2:22-36

Today we are in part five of our 6-part series where we are seeking to chase, what the 5th century Celtic Christians- those Christians over in Britain, Ireland and Scotland, called the Holy Spirit. But in their Gaelic tongue it came out *An Geadh-Glas* or Wild Goose. For the benefit of those who might be new to this series the first Sunday we talked about the Cage of Responsibility; the second Sunday the Cage of Routine; the third Sunday we addressed the Cage of Assumptions; last Sunday we focus on the Cage of Guilt and today we will talk about breaking out of the Cage of Failure.

When Jim Burke became the head of a new products division at Johnson & Johnson, one of his first projects was the development of a children's chest rub. The product failed miserably, and Burke expected that he would be fired. When he was called in to see the chairman of the board, however, he met a surprising reception. "Are you the one who just cost us all that money?" asked Robert Wood Johnson.

"Well I just want to congratulate you. If you are making mistakes, that means you are taking risks, and we won't grow unless you take risks."

Some years later, when Burke himself became chairman of J&J, he continued to spread that word. [Reader's Digest, Oct, 1991, p. 62.](#)

It was President Theodore Roosevelt who once said, "The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything." Do you know that Thomas Edison spent more than \$100,000 to obtain 6,000 different fiber specimens, and only three of them proved satisfactory? Each failure brought him that much closer to the solution to his problem. His friend Henry Ford was right when he said that failure was the "opportunity to begin again, more intelligently." [Warren W. Wiersbe, Confident Living, September, 1987, p. 22.](#)

When you think about it, Edison was the king of perseverance. He was heard to say, "Many of life's failures are men who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."

Let me ask you- think about something that you failed at- maybe it was an attempt at painting, or cooking special dessert that was to come out a specific way. After you made your attempt and it didn't work out, did you become discouraged and stop trying? That can certainly be an option that we take, can it not? And yet when you think of the spiritual realm, failure is many times what God uses to get us right where He wants us to go. Think about this- **sometimes our plans, ideas, hopes have to fail so that God's way, God's plan can succeed**. The key for us is to keep on keeping on, keep pressing forward so that we can break out of the discouraging cage of failure.

There is not a one of us who hasn't failed. The question then becomes, what are we going to do with our failure? There are three things I want to share with you today as it relates to the Cage of Failure.

First, **in order to break out of failure, REMEMBER THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**. What do we mean by "the sovereignty of God?" We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can interrupt his work and no one can call his rule into question. (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, stop His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of

dynasties as He pleases. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15).

Such is the God of the Bible.

Please look with me again at Acts 2:23 where we read, "this man [referring to Jesus], handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." God knew exactly what He was doing as it related to the cross. And yet, upon face value, the cross upon which Christ hung, looking through worldly eyes, would seem to be the moment of God's greatest failure. I mean, it was, by all human understanding, the greatest sign of defeat- the Messiah suffered and died a horrific death. And the cross was, at first, seen as a contradiction to Peter and the other followers of Jesus, for this object was not seen as something that would bring about the reign of the Messiah that Israel had been praying for; it only brought death. Many in Israel were waiting for a warrior King. And so, when Jesus suffered and died on a cross they thought all hope was gone.

But as we are finding out about failure, and God, the plans that people had for their warrior Messiah had to fail so that God's plans could succeed. And as we read in Acts 2:23, the death of Jesus Christ was according to the plan of God, who can turn apparent failures into great victories.

And so if God is sovereign, then there is nothing in your life or mine that is outside the sovereignty, the reign of Almighty God.

Second, **to break out of failure, REMEMBER PAST VICTORIES.**

When things are not going right; when we seem to find ourselves in one setback after another it is easy to forget the victories in our lives. C. S. Lewis, in *The Screwtape Letters*, vividly describes Satan's strategy: He gets Christians to become preoccupied with their failures; from then on, the battle is won." Erwin Lutzer, *Failure: The Back Door to Success*

I know this sounds out there, so please listen carefully to what I am about to say- God had been planning the death of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, from the beginning of time.

Friends, **God had a plan and it goes like this: Creation, Fall,**

Redemption. And ever since the fall of humankind when sin came into this world, God's plan was put into motion and God had been putting the pieces of the puzzle together, orchestrating the events of the past so that He could accomplish the seeming failure of the cross.

Look at Acts 2:30-31 where we read, "Since he [meaning David] was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would put one of his descendents on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'" And friends, if there was going to be a resurrection of the Messiah, He had to die, and of course God took what seemed to be a failure, the cross and brought about the ultimate victory- Jesus' rising from the dead.

I hope each of us can go back into our memory banks to remember, for just a moment, some of our past failures where God, in His infinite wisdom, redeemed some of those failures which can help us break out of a current failure we may be experiencing. God desperately loves us and He will not leave us or forsake us and what He has done for us in the past He will do for us again. To break out of failure, don't forget past victories, don't forget.

And third, **to break out of failure, REMEMBER SUNDAY**

MORNING. Acts 2:32 says, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses." This is Sunday Morning, this is Easter Morning and every morning is Easter Morning from now on.

Think about it, Jesus had suffered and died and was buried. The end; finished; over- and so the disciples lived in, what seemed to be a failure, for three days after Good Friday. And Peter, who preached the sermon where our passage today is found, lived during those three days with his own

failure. For it was this same Peter, who, after Jesus was arrested and held by the authorities that Thursday night had denied ever knowing Jesus three times, count them, three times- Peter denied knowing Jesus in the courtyard when questioned by the servant-girl; then, someone else seeing Peter said he was "one of them," in other words a follower of Jesus and again he denies it; and finally there is the third denial when he is said to have been with Jesus and was said to be a Galilean. Oh, this man who delivered this fabulous sermon in Acts 2 had to live with his own failure of turning his back on the Savior. What changed it all for Peter and what can change it all for us is Sunday Morning. For God brought forth the greatest victory the world has ever known out of the most unbelievable failure the world has ever known. And if God could do that, then God can redeem our situations, our circumstances, whatever we are going through as well.

Today, we celebrate our Presbyterian Scottish heritage. The Reformers of the 16th century gave their all, some gave their very lives to

reform the church. People like Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in Switzerland, and John Knox in Scotland risked it all. They suffered persecution and many failures but through it all, they kept steadfast to their beliefs and their faith in the God who would sustain them and see them through, even the darkest of nights. Why, Knox was imprisoned for his stance for some 19 months and yet, "Knox lived to see the Scottish reform church emerging from the struggles of a generation to eventually enjoy the legal and financial status of which he may often have thought there was little hope, and to see, in his own words, the 'perfect concord' of England and Scotland settled on the basis of 'the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified.'"

(John Knox, Scotland's Great Reformer, by Professor Emeritus Gordon Donaldson, Pitkin Pictorials LTD, 1990)

The point is this- we all will fail. It is a fact, it is inevitable. Welcome to life. But what happens after we fail is what will separate those who chase the Wild Goose, the Holy Spirit from those who do not.

The story of Jesus Christ is not a tragedy but rather a victory, a triumph.

God, in His infinite wisdom knew exactly what He was doing from the get-go.

And so, when you think about it, there are absolutely no circumstances in our lives that take God by surprise. God was at work in all the

circumstances related to the crucifixion of His only Son, Jesus Christ. And

yet, Good Friday, the death of Jesus had to happen if there was going to be

an Easter. Remember, the tomb is empty. And so whenever we find

ourselves in the midst of a failure, we can know, we can be confident that

the God who was with Jesus Christ is with us and for us. He is present, He

is there working and moving in our difficulties, and He can use them for

victory. Break out of the Cage of Failure and Live. Amen.

"THE CAGE OF FAILURE"

Acts 2:22-36

Introduction: Jim Burke's failure at Johnson and Johnson

Think about something you failed at...

Sometimes our plans, ideas, hopes have to fail so that God's way can _____

Three things to share related to the Cage of Failure

First, **in order to break out of failure, REMEMBER THE _____ OF GOD- this means...**

Acts 2:23: "definite plan and foreknowledge of God"

Second, **to break out of failure, REMEMBER PAST _____**

God had a plan, it goes like this: **Creation, Fall, Redemption**

Acts 2:30-31

Third, **to break out of failure, REMEMBER SUNDAY _____**

Acts 2:32—Every morning is Easter morning from now on

Peter had to deal with failure- he denied knowing Jesus 3 times

Our Presbyterian Scottish heritage

John Knox

We all will fail. What happens after we fail is what will separate those who chase the Wild Goose from those who do not.

Conclusion: Remember, the tomb is empty.... God is present, He is there working and moving in our difficulties, and He can use them for victory. Break out of the Cage of Failure and Live.