

THE BAD GUYS WHO BECAME GOOD GUYS

Text: Romans 8:31, 32

In our Bible study entitled, "Famous/Infamous Stories of the Bible" we have always been able to clearly define the protagonist (good guy) and the antagonist (bad guy). Today I would like to discuss those in the Bible that were the baddies who became the goodies.

The natural and human tendency of life is to make and allow the bad moments and even habitual shortcomings of life become the definition of who you are. Circumstances should not define you, but refine you, turning the ashes of your past into the diamonds of your future. The myth of the Phoenix tells of a mystical, magical bird that, after a long life, dies and is enveloped within a fire that reduces it to ashes. This myth has even developed into an idiom in the English language, "To rise from the ashes like the Phoenix." Why do make-believe stories like this survive in every culture? I believe it is because of a deep longing to rise up from the trap of permanent failure. Don't underestimate what God is able to do on our behalf. Don't allow your present circumstances to define you. God uses our setbacks as setups. Be still, trust and keep the faith. I like the motto the British used during the dark and lethal days of the merciless Luftwaffe invasion of Nazi Germany: "Keep calm and carry on." Blessings await those who do not let a sad state of affairs fatalistically determine the rest of their lives. You are not who your past says you are; you are who God has chosen you to be. Don't let your history interfere with your destiny! There is a problem in believing you are trapped by your circumstances. It is not only a defining situation, but it develops into a confining way of life.

Look at the setbacks as something different than chance; make the calamity a time of choice. See your adversity as a parenthesis, not a period. Look at this beautiful attitude of Joseph as depicted in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

In Ephesians 1:7 we hear these redefining words, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Redeemed comes from three Greek words, "bought in the market place," "bought out of the market place to never go there again" and "to set free." It has been defined by Strong's concordance, "to be ransomed in full." God's word constantly reminds us that in the very worst of moments, in the midst of wasted days and even wasted years, the final chapter has not been written.

Leon Trotsky, one of the authors of that wicked form of government, communism, said, "There are no absolute rules of conduct, either in peace or war. Everything depends on circumstances." He lied! To quote a better philosopher, Yogi Berra, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Better than that, Jesus said in John 8:44b in reference to the Devil, "...there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." The Devil is a master at attempting to take the past failures of our life and inculcating them into our present status to make our future useless. The Bible declares in Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." According to this verse we are in the category of "losers" without Christ. Look (with joy) to what Paul says in I Corinthians 15:9, 10: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul never pretended to be anything without Jesus. This is why he could affirm, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). Consider these Bible personalities that experienced permanent turnaround becoming ultimate winners:

1. Moses, the Murderer

Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:22-28

Moses was highly respected in Egypt and even believed by some to be in line to be the next pharaoh. Then he took the life of an Egyptian and had to flee for his life. God was not finished with him, in Exodus 3, God called and commissioned him to lead the entire nation of Israel out of Egypt.

2. Rahab, the Harlot

Joshua 6:25

Rahab addressed the Israeli spies in Joshua 2:10, 11, "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." After hiding the spies, "Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall" (Joshua 2:15). The spies then told her to bind the scarlet cord in the window and her household would be saved. This scarlet thread is symbolical of the cleansing blood of Jesus that can make even harlots pure. Her legacy is recorded in Matthew 1:5 in the direct lineage of Jesus.

3. Ruth, the Heathen

Ruth 1:16,17

What a brave young lady was Ruth! She forsook all and followed her grieving mother-in-law to a land she had never known, a land where she was considered a heathen. I Corinthians 6:11 reminds us, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." She too, was in the lineage of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

4. Jephthah, the Illegitimate

Judges 11:1-3

Jephthah was rejected by his brethren, but accepted and used of God. Martha Washington said, "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances."

5. Jacob, the Cheater

Genesis 27:36

Esau, the twin brother of Jacob had every intention of taking his life for cheating him out of his birthright. God watched over this twisted trickster and revealed himself as the omnipresent God in Genesis 28:16, 17. Then in Genesis 32:24-31 God wrestled the twistedness out of Jacob, until he became Israel, a prince for God who had power with God and men.

6. Isaac, the Coward

Genesis 26:7

Isaac inherited from Abraham a tendency to cower. He should have picked up his dad's ultimate faith instead of early cowardice. The Lord did not penalize Isaac for his cowardice; he was forgiven and used of God. We find in Genesis 26:12 and 13 that God used him in spite of his cowardice. In the New Testament John Mark failed due to his cowardly ways, but years later Paul said, "...Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (II Timothy 4:11).

7. Mary, the Demonized

Mark 16:9

8. Peter the Denier

Luke 22:61, 62

9. David and Bathsheba, the Adulterers

Psalm 51; Proverbs 31

Conclusion:

Jeremiah 17:1-14; Jeremiah 18:1-6

G.K. Chesterton said, "Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances that we know to be desperate." See beyond the problem--look to Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.