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THE LIFE OF CHRIST - A FAILURE

Matthew 27:26-50

Nobody likes to be called a failure. In fact, failure is one of our greatest fears. Failure means we're rejected. It means our lives really aren't as valuable as we had hoped.

We don't like stories that end in failure: they're too close to home. But we do like stories that turn failure into success and victory.

R. H. Macy failed seven times before his store in New York became a success. English novelist John Creasey got 753 rejection slips, but later published 564 books. Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs. Maury Wills stole 104 bases in 1962, a record for the Dodgers. In 1965, he also had a great season for stolen bases. But that year he also got caught trying to steal 31 times, another, less pleasant record for the Dodgers.

Those who keep trying in the face of failure, and eventually succeed are our heroes. But we don't like to think about those who are failures throughout their entire lives. We want the stories to end in success!

Success is a goal we all strive for. We may each define success differently, but as soon as we have it defined, we start striving for it. We want to be "successful" and all our efforts are centered on that goal.

But, against this background of our success-oriented society, I want to tell you about the life of Jesus Christ. By our standards, his life was a total failure! Possibly the most total failure of all time!

At the very beginning of his life, failure struck a mighty blow! Here was a birth like no other birth in all of history! What other birth was announced in the sky by a troop of angels? What other birth led shepherds to leave their flocks to go and see? What other birth brought wise men far from the east to worship the new born child?

By all intentions, Jesus' birth was heralded as the greatest event of all history! And how was it received? Matthew 2:3 says, "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Jesus was not well received at all! In fact, he was hated and attacked. Matthew 2:16 says, "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under,

according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men." From the moment Jesus was born, his life was a failure.

Thirty years later, Jesus set out to change the world. He was publicly announced to the world by his distant cousin, the famous preacher, John the Baptist. And immediately he was attacked by Satan. Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness for forty days. Satan tried everything he could think of to defeat Jesus and turn him away from his purpose.

Matthew 4:8, 9 says, "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Jesus resisted the temptation and Satan left him for a season. But this was only the beginning of Satan's attacks.

Luke 4:14, 15 says, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all."

Matthew 4:17 says, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mark 1:15 says, "And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Luke 4:16-21 says, "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Jesus openly announced to them that he was God's anointed one. Did they receive him with rejoicing? Luke 4:28, 29 says, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." Failure!

Then Jesus began to confirm his authority for all to see by performing miracles that only one sent by God would be capable of. At the wedding in Cana in Galilee, he began his miracles by changing water into wine when the host ran out of wine for his guests.

Jesus exercised his authority: he made a small whip and used it to drive the moneychangers out of the temple. This "gentle" Jesus didn't hesitate to give a well-deserved whipping to those who needed it. And like a father spanking a disobedient child, he accompanied the whipping with clear instruction for improvement, In John 2:16 He said, "...Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

But they denied his authority and rebelled against it. In the same way that a stubborn child complains about a spanking, they demanded that Jesus prove that he had the authority to whip them and drive them out of the temple. He claimed his authority by offering them the ultimate proof, In John 2:19 He said, "...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He said that when they killed him, he would rise again in three days! But still they rejected him. More failure!

Nevertheless, Jesus began to build a following. He traveled through Galilee, calling disciples to follow him, healing the sick, and teaching the people the way of life that God intended for them. But few of the aristocracy joined his following; the rich and powerful continued to reject him wherever he turned, even in his own home town of Nazareth!

Jesus performed even greater miracles. His authority was unmistakably confirmed. He walked right across the Sea of Galilee! He fed 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish! He was physically glorified at the transfiguration; Elijah and Moses appearing with him in shining light on top of a mountain. But he knew that the greater evidence would only end in greater rejection. Matthew 17:22, 23 says, "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son

of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry."

Jesus then went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. It was there that he forgave the woman taken in adultery, and it was there that he gave sight to the man who had been blind from birth. But the Pharisees' opposition to him grew with every miracle he performed. When he cast a demon out of a man who couldn't speak, the Pharisees even accused him of being in league with the Devil! Failure upon failure!

Moving out into the nearby province of Perea, Jesus continued teaching the multitudes. It was there that he raised Lazarus from the dead, the ultimate miracle! But the ultimate miracle was quickly followed by the ultimate rejection: the council of the Chief Priests and the Pharisees determined to kill him! The ultimate failure!

At this point, Jesus only had a week left to live. The storms of hatred and betrayal were gathering over Jerusalem and in the heart of Judas Iscariot even as Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of "Hosanna..." and "...Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord..." (Matthew 21:9.)

Again, Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple. His teaching was now calculated to confront the Scribes and Pharisees who were plotting his death. He openly called them fools, hypocrites, snakes, murderers, God haters, and children of Hell!

And so they took him and crucified him. He had failed completely. Everything he had tried to teach they had ignored. They rejected both him and the way of life he was teaching. His entire ministry had been a total waste; an isolated oasis in the desert of sin and corruption that covered the entire world. It was over! He had lost! Satan had won! Total failure!

Or so Satan thought. But what a rude awakening he was in for!

In Matthew 28:1-6 we read, "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was

like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Jesus had lost the battle but won the war! His life had been a total failure, but his death was the ultimate success! His life failed to change our behavior, but his death paid the penalty and changed our very lives!

On the basis of Christ crucified, Paul was able to preach the gospel of God, in Romans 1:3-4, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:"

Yes, the life of Jesus Christ was a failure. He could have been a success. He could have come as a conquering hero: He will come as a conquering hero someday soon! But, thank God that He chose to come as a failure! Thank God that He chose to die so that we may live! May our lives be that kind of failure too! Hallelujah! Amen!

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