**PERFECT**

***One Man’s Righteous Act***

Surely all of you reading this have heard of the greatest baseball pitcher in all of history, right? No, I’m not talking about Cy Young, who won 511 games in the Major Leagues, and for whom the trophy is named for the greatest pitcher each season. And no, I’m not talking about Nolan Ryan, who pitched seven no-hitters, and struck out over 5,000 hitters in his amazing 27-year career. Some of you will argue that Sandy Koufax, Steve Carlton, Bob Gibson, Roger Clemens or Randy Johnson was the King of the Hill as the greatest pitcher. They were great alright. But not the greatest. That title goes to none other than Ron Necciai.

What? You never heard of Ron Necciai? He had an awful one win and six losses in 1952 pitching for the Pittsburg Pirates, allowing seven runs per nine innings pitched. That was his only season in the Major Leagues. Yes, that is truly pathetic. But you need to know that earlier that season, while pitching for the Class D minor league team for the Pirates, he pitched a perfect game. I don’t just mean he got all 27 batters out in a nine-inning game. Many pitchers have done that. I mean he actually struck out all 27 batters he faced! Not one hitter even touched the baseball that day! All he needed was his catcher, for the other fielders could have stayed in the dugout or laid on the grass and taken a nap. Ron Necciai (pronounced neh-chai) became the only player in professional baseball history to pitch an actual “perfect” game!

If you don’t like baseball, maybe you like bowling. If you are an avid bowler you have heard of Jeremy Sonnenfeld. In 1997 he bowled a perfect three-game trifecta by making a strike (knocking down all 10 pins) in 36 consecutive frames. A perfect game is 300 in which you throw 12 straight strikes. But you must bowl three games in a league match. He proceeded to throw three perfect games!

PERFECTION. All of us who have ever tried to reach perfection in anything, regardless of what we are doing (sports, academics, picking stocks, marriage, child-rearing) know that the odds of reaching that level are mathematically impossible. No, it is not technically impossible (Ron Necciai proved that on one remarkable day in 1952, and Jeremy Sonnenfeld did it for one day in 1997), but statistically hopeless.

But let us talk about the most important area where the goal of perfection is absolutely critical to whether or not we will go to heaven or hell. Without perfection batting against Satan’s curve balls, fastballs and changeups you will become known as a sinner and stand condemned before a holy, perfect God.

Mathematically, and technically, it is not impossible to live a perfect life. The Bible clearly says, *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (I Cor. 10:12-13). There is always provided “the way of escape.” You don’t have to sin! You can live a perfect sinless life.

But let’s now talk reality. Just as I vowed on June 17, 1977 to “be faithful unto death” to Benita as her husband, I have just “slightly” fallen short of being perfect (please don’t ask her to elaborate on that comment). And, just as I vowed on April 26, 1964 to Jesus that I would make Him my Lord for the rest of my life, I have “*sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” more times than I care to admit over these past 57 years (Rom. 3:23). So have you. “*There is none righteous, no, not one*!” (Rom. 3:10).

Ahhh, but that’s not completely true. Let’s rephrase that verse, adding God’s caveat. **There is ONE righteous, yes, but one**.

Romans 5 tells us this life-saving, soul-saving exception:

“*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned* … *Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through* ***one Man’s righteous act*** *the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:12,18-19).

“*One Man’s Righteous Act*.” Of course, that one righteous act was speaking of Christ’s crucifixion. That One unselfish act provided for our “justification of life.”

But that “One Righteous Act” had to first be preceded by 33 years of many righteous acts! I’m very sure there are many who have lived sinless and righteous for one day. But for an entire lifetime??? Christ’s “one righteous act” at Calvary was the result of a perfect sinless life that dates back to Nazareth. Brethren, that staggers the mind. We cannot fathom how anyone could go day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for three decades – and never once fall to temptation. Adam could have resisted but didn’t. We could have resisted but haven’t. Jesus could have sinned, but – thanks be to God – He didn’t. He was perfect!

Jesus was that “*lamb without blemish and without spot*” (I Pet 1:19). Jesus was the only man “*who committed no sin*” (I Pet. 2:22). Morally and ethically Jesus lived above sin. Oh, I believe He made mistakes as a child growing up. He likely mis-measured a board He cut in His dad’s carpenter’s shop. He probably burned His fingers as a teenager on a hot kettle over the fire, or bumped His head while playing with His brothers. Remember He “*grew in wisdom, and stature*…” while growing up (Luke 2:52).

Our Lord, in His moral character, pitched a “perfect game” all His life. It was “One Righteous Act” which ultimately saved us, but it was thousands of righteous acts that led to that historic moment at Golgotha which enabled Him to die for our sins.

Let us not just think of His “One Righteous Act” on our behalf, but those tens of thousands of righteous acts over His entire life that gave Him the right to become our Savior.

Ron Necciai and Jeremy Sonnenfeld were athletically perfect for one shining moment on one amazing day. But Jesus was morally perfect His entire life so that for one glorious moment on one glorious day God will proclaim us righteous and be told, “enter into the joy of the Lord.”

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us perfection. - Rick