**DEFYING MY COMFORT ZONE**

***Stand Up Stand Up For Jesus***

As a teenager of the 1960’s I was held spell-bound by the flamboyant daredevil named Evel Knievel. His death-defying motorcycle jumps became the stuff of legend, whether they were successful or catastrophes. He was featured many times on the much-watched *ABC’s Wide World Of Sports*. He would roar off of ramps at high speeds to soar over 14 school buses, plus an open cage of rattlesnakes, a chained mountain lion, and a ring of fire, hopefully landing to the cheers of the excited crowd. He failed almost as much as he succeeded, breaking nearly every bone in his body over his career. On live TV before millions of viewers he once attempted to jump over Snake Canyon in Idaho. He failed, landing safely by parachute in the Snake River below. Crazy! Insane!

I played sports, including football, in my younger life, breaking my nose (several times), fingers, wrist, cheek, leg and collar bone. But, I’ll be honest with you, I was no Evel Knievel. When we were teens my brother bought a Motor Scooter to deliver his news-papers. I drove it some. But that was the extent of my “Born To Be Wild” experiences.

I am very reluctant to leave my comfort zone and become a risk taker. Most of us are. And that is a wise thing in most areas of life. I don’t sky dive, bungee jump, wrestle gators, or repel off mountains. I’ve never owned a sports car, motorcycle or even a Go-Kart. I don’t even skateboard or ski over moguls. Oh, why not confess all of my timid ways, I don’t even roller skate for fear of falling. Here in Minnesota I even tread lightly, even to the point of shuffling, when I walk across a pond of ice in winter, knowing it is 12 inches thick (enough to drive a Mack truck over). When I do my financial checkup with my advisor he grades my risk tolerance for investing as VC (Very Conservative). When kids picked on me and called me “Scaredy Cat,” I simply meowed back. Risk taker? Hardly. I’m the Caspar Milquetoast of the 1940’s and 50’s comic strip *The Timid Soul* who was portrayed as “*the man who speaks softly and gets hit with the big stick*.”

But, to gain eternal life, to get to heaven as a disciple of Christ, there is a risk I must take that far exceeds any death-defying daredevil stunts. I must do something far more breath-taking than Evel Knievel ever dreamed of. Are you curious?

Do you remember the powerful statement Jesus told His apostles just before He went to the cross? Read it very carefully:

“*Most assuredly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and* ***dies*** *it remains alone; but if it* ***dies****, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life*.” (John 12:24-25).

The illustration Jesus gives of a grain of wheat is so simple, yet so powerful. Everybody can see that to produce a bushel full of wheat you first have to put a seed in the ground and allow it to die so that it can germinate and grow. Without death there is no crop.

So it is with our personal life. Without losing your life in a cause greater than yourself there can be no growth. To do that you have to get out of your comfort zone. You must push yourself past the easy lifestyle that virtually everybody else is living. Paul did, expressing it as a self-crucifixion:

“*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gal. 2:20)

My job as a preacher is to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable. If you are living a comfortable life due to never taking a risk for Jesus’ sake, I ask you to do something crazier than skydiving, bungee jumping, or imitating Evel Knievel. I’m asking you to do as the old hymn written by George Duffield states in the second stanza,

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict in this His glorious day.
Ye that are men now serve Him against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose.

A volunteer in the Lord’s army will result in battles fought “against unnumbered foes,” requiring you to “let courage rise with danger.” Courage is not the absence of fear, but trusting God through the fear. When you stare danger in the face, take courage.

John Chrysostom lived from 347 to 407 A.D. He preached in Constantinople in the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire. He spoke boldly against the riches and power of the ruling class, condemning their lavish lifestyles. This angered Eudoxia, the wife of the Emperor Arcadius, who threatened to exile him. His courageous response is worthy of quoting, and imitating:

**“What can I fear? Will it be death? But you know that Christ is my life, and that I shall gain by death. Will it be exile? But the earth and all its fullness is the Lord’s. Will it be the loss of wealth? But we brought nothing into the world, and can carry nothing out. Thus all the terrors of the world are contemptible in my eyes, and I smile at all its good things. Poverty I do not fear. Riches I do not sigh for. Death I do not shrink from.”**

Someone who lived 300 years before Chrysostom said it even better while chained in a Roman prison:

*“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.* ***For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain****”* (Phil. 1:19-21).

Yes, as Jesus said, for grain to grow the seed must die. I might be a timid soul when it comes to being a daredevil like Evel Knievel, but I pray with all my heart that when the trumpet of the Lord calls you will know that I will stand up, stand up, for Jesus.

The trumpet is blowing now. Leave your comfort zone. Let courage rise with danger.

 – Rick