

Let Down? Look Up! - Acts 9:25-31

by Jon Courson

Jon Courson's sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's plan and finding rest in His direction, even when faced with disappointment.

Scripture: Romans 9:3

Topics: "Surrender To God", "Trusting Jesus"

Description

Jon Courson delivers a sermon on the importance of surrendering to God's plan, using the Apostle Paul's experiences as examples. Paul's willingness to be let down in a basket from the city wall in Damascus and later to be redirected to the Gentiles instead of the Jews showcases the power of yielding to God's leading. Courson emphasizes the need to trust God's direction even when it seems contrary to our plans, highlighting the rest and peace that come from fully surrendering to Jesus and allowing Him to lead us.

Transcript

A book appeared on the New York Times Bestseller list which deals with statistics and probabilities. It's an intriguing volume, wherein the author, a statistician, presents nuggets of information like these: One in 1,000 Americans will have murdered someone in his lifetime. (Next time you're at a baseball park or a football stadium with 40,000 other folks, keep in mind that statistically there are 40 murderers in the stadium with you.)

One in 200 Americans will spend time in prison. Seven in 10 who start a company will see it go bankrupt. Nine in 10 who lose weight on a diet will gain back every single pound. (If you start a business, the odds are 70% it will go belly-up. And if you go on a diet, the odds are 90% it will be belly out!) The chance of being hit by lightning is 1 in 9,000. The chance of winning the lottery is 1 in 4,000,000.

But the chance of being let down by someone or something is 1 in 1 -- which brings us to our text -- where we see the Apostle Paul, still called Saul at this point, let down from the city wall in a basket. Initially, it must have been disconcerting, disappointing, and disillusioning to him -- but, Paul would later write that this time of being let down -- in more ways than one -- would be the second greatest event in his life.

Turn to II Corinthians 11. If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands. II Corinthians 11:30-33

Paul says, 'If I'm going to glory, this is what I will glory in: my difficulty.' Listen to this paraphrase of II Corinthians 11: 'The greatest event in my life was when they took me at night and let me down over the wall of Damascus in a basket. That was the most meaningful experience I have ever had since the day I met Christ.' Far from feeling let down by this event, Paul actually gloried in it. But it took time.

You see, following his conversion, Paul's singular passion was to preach Christ to the Jews. In Romans 9:3 he says he would literally go to hell if it brought about their salvation. Would you do that? Would you spend eternity in hell if your brother would be saved? I know nothing of that kind of love. Paul cared so deeply for Israel that he said he would be accursed for his brethren. Trained as a Jewish scholar and theologian, it would seem as though Paul was tailor-made to be a minister unto the Jew. But in Acts 9:15, God had told Ananias that Paul's ministry would be first to the Gentiles, secondly to kings, and lastly to Jews. So what did Paul do?

Acts 9:20 tells us he headed straight for the synagogues -- to preach to the Jews. So poorly was he received, however, that his audience wanted to kill him, necessitating his escape by night in a basket. What did he do then? He headed for Jerusalem -- the very capital of Judaism! We pick up the story as Paul shares his testimony in Acts 22.

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. Acts 22:17-21

What's happening here? After spending fifteen days in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18), Paul went into the Temple. Through a trance, the Lord said to him, 'I'm sending you to the Gentiles, Paul,' to which Paul answered, 'But Lord, You're missing a great opportunity! The Jews here know I was a radical on their behalf, going into the synagogues and the homes where Christians met, to drag them out and have them killed. They know I consented to the death of Stephen, the first martyr. Don't you see, Lord, how powerful my testimony could be here in Jerusalem?' And the Lord responded by saying, 'Depart, Paul. I'm sending you to the Gentiles.'

So Paul was sent to Tarsus where he would spend between seven and ten years laboring in obscurity. Maybe you can relate to this. Maybe, like Paul, you have said, 'Lord, You're missing a great opportunity. I'm custom-made to reach these people. If You bless my business, my family, this project -- Lord, just think how good it would be!' And the Lord says, 'Depart. I'm sending you somewhere else.' In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest.' Rest from what? Rest from your works, rest from trying to be spiritual, rest from trying to be religious. Jesus said,

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Matthew 11:29

When you come to Jesus initially, you find rest from your works. But it's only when you are yoked to Jesus that you find rest in your heart. Perhaps today you might have rest from your works -- you've been born

again; you're a believer -- but you don't have rest in your heart. You're troubled about many things: family, finances, ministry, health, relationships.

Do you know why that is? We are troubled in our hearts when we fail to take His yoke upon us; when we try to call the shots and direct what we think should happen. Our ideas could be good, our motives noble -- but not what He intends. If you're troubled today because someone let you down, some project didn't open up, some relationship didn't work out -- you can become a basket case -- let down over the side of the wall in bitterness and defeat. O, like Paul, you can learn to trust the Lord and see a bigger picture by saying, 'Your way, Lord, not mine. I give up. I let go. What do You want to do? I yoke myself with You.'

What is a yoke? Something which connects a weaker, dumber ox to a stronger, wiser ox. Guess which ox you are. 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' Jesus says to us. 'Link to Me and learn of Me. Let Me lead you.' 'But, Lord,' we say, 'We can bless those folks. We can see things happen! Come on, Lord.' And we try to pull God in our direction.

That's what Paul was trying to do. And it took seven to ten years before he finally gave up. Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, changed the world when he accepted the yoke the Lord placed upon him and said, 'OK, we'll go in Your direction.' That is why Paul looked back on the day he was let down in a basket as the most important day in his life, second only to the day he met Christ (II Corinthians 11:30-33). What if Paul hadn't learned that lesson? What if he kept storming into synagogues, trying to make a way into Jerusalem? He would have either died at a very young age, or he would have had a very ineffective ministry.

Don't try to persuade the Lord to go your way. When you're let down, don't give up. Instead, say, 'OK, Lord, what do You want to do now?' His plan for you might be very different than your own. His vision of you might be different than the way you see yourself because those whose ministry is based upon their own abilities, skills, and talents are those who have a tendency to take the glory for themselves.

'To the Gentiles, Paul. I want to do an entirely different thing through you,' said the Lord. 'But my heart --' protested Paul. 'To the Gentiles, Paul,' answered the Lord. 'But my background --' 'To the Gentiles, Paul.' 'But my training --' 'To the Gentiles, Paul.' 'But, Lord --' 'To the Gentiles, Paul.' 'But --' 'To the Gentiles, Paul.' 'OK, Lord.' Some of you will make that decision today. You'll finally choose to say, 'OK, Lord.' And when you do, you will find rest in your soul.

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