

The Comeback

Mark 16:1-7

Sunday, March 23, 2008

Pastor Chris McMillan

Introduction: The date was March 2, 1974. Two of college basketball's winningest programs were battling for supremacy in Chapel Hill, NC. Duke led North Carolina by 8 points with 17 seconds left. Carolina fans were already leaving their seats and heading for the parking lot. For all intents and purposes the game was over. There was absolutely no way any team could come back from an 8 point deficit with only 17 seconds left to play, especially since this was long before the day of the 3-pointer. But the fans that stayed would end up seeing the greatest comeback in basketball history. North Carolina scored 8 points in 17 seconds and sent the game into overtime where they won the game. What seemed impossible became a reality.

Today we celebrate the greatest comeback of all time, when Jesus came back from the dead. On Friday things looked hopeless to the disciples of Jesus. Here was this rabbi and prophet that claimed to be God and healed the sick and raised the dead dying on a cross. There was no angelic intervention or miraculous deliverance from the cross. All the hopes and dreams the disciples had seemed to be forever buried beneath an avalanche of sorrow and despair. Here was their Savior, the One they had given up everything to follow, being tortured and crucified right in front of their very eyes. Each blow of the hammer drove another nail in the coffin of their hopes. Saturday came and the disciples had to come to the realization that their Savior was dead and buried. This was no nightmare this was now the stark reality of their life. All hope had been abandoned. But Sunday was coming. On Sunday, at the first ray of dawn death was swallowed up in victory and Jesus arose from the grave. What seemed impossible only a few days before became reality. What seemed like complete and utter defeat; what seemed like the ultimate setback turned into the greatest comeback of all time!

I believe in comebacks. In my own life I have experienced a comeback. You may be facing all sorts of setbacks in your life today but God can turn your setback into a comeback. You may feel as if you are being crucified today but there is a resurrection right around the corner. Just go ahead and begin to prepare yourself for the greatest comeback of your life. The Bible tells us, *"If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ*

from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit that lives in you” (Rom.8:11).

There was once two frogs, a large fat one and a smaller thinner one. One day, they came upon a pail of cream and hopped in to drink. The cream was over their heads, but being frogs they swam about drinking the sweet cream. After they had drunk what they could they discovered that they could not jump out of the pail. They struggled for several minutes trying to get out. The larger frog didn't see any hope of getting out so he just gave up, and allowed himself to drown. The smaller frog wouldn't allow himself to give up and kept kicking and struggling in an attempt to get out. As he was losing strength he gave what he thought would be his last kick, and as he kicked as hard as he could the cream turned to butter. He then climbed up onto the butter and hopped out.

We have to have the attitude of that frog that says though I may be facing difficulty and adversity today I'm not going to let it get me down because I know there is a comeback right around the corner.

Transitional Sentence: If we are going to experience a comeback we need to remember three things.

1. Your setback doesn't have to be fatal.

For some believers setbacks are fatal events from which they never recover. When adversity comes they give in to doubt, hopelessness and despair. Many well-meaning committed Christians have been sidelined because of setbacks. Don't let the setbacks of your past or present determine your future.

I don't know about you but I have determined not to allow my setbacks to dictate my future. I refuse to be refused. There are some people who just will not be stopped. They have made incredible comebacks despite setbacks. They refuse to listen to their fears. Nothing anyone says or does can hold them back. As Ted Engstrom insightfully writes in his book *Pursuit of Excellence*:

- Cripple him and you have a Sir Walter Scott.
- Lock him in a prison cell and you have a John Bunyan.
- Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge and you have a George Washington.
- Raise him in abject poverty and you have an Abraham Lincoln.

- Strike him down with infantile paralysis and he will become a Franklin Roosevelt.
- Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again and you have a Glenn Cunningham –who set the world's one mile record in 1934.
- Deafen him and you have a Ludwig Von Beethoven.
- Have him born black in a society filled with racial discrimination and you have a Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver.
- Call him a slow learner "retarded" and write him off as uneducated and you have an Albert Einstein.

There are two characters that play a major part in the Easter story: Judas and Peter. Both Judas and Peter faced colossal setbacks. Judas allowed his setbacks to be fatal while Peter turned his setback into a comeback. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Consumed with guilt over what he had done Judas went back to the Jewish leaders threw the blood money at their feet and went out and hung himself. Judas was so distraught by his setback that he allowed it to become fatal. Peter also failed. He promised Jesus he would never leave him or forsake him but when it came time to stand he denied that he even knew Jesus. Both Peter and Judas failed miserably. Judas allowed his setback to be fatal, but Peter made a comeback. When Jesus rose from the dead the very first name he mentioned was Peter. This same Peter who had just days before failed miserably in a few weeks would stand up on the Day of Pentecost and preach so powerfully that 3,000 people would be saved. Peter would become one of the chief leaders in the early church. Now that's a comeback!

2. Your setback will make you profitable for the Kingdom of God.

Setbacks have a purpose in our lives. God has an uncanny way of turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones. In the midst of these setbacks God is working on, in and through us. Our setbacks and failures never take God by surprise. In fact, they are the raw materials that He uses to prepare us for greatness. God's goal for our life is not to make us comfortable or necessarily happy. His goal for our life is to make us useful and profitable for the Kingdom of God. The way that He does this is by allowing setbacks in our life.

In Acts 15:36-40 we find a very interesting story about a man named John Mark who had a major setback, "*Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not it wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.*"

It is obvious from this account that John Mark had a major setback during the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. We don't know exactly what happened, we just know that John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas and returned home. Maybe things weren't turning out like he planned, maybe he was discouraged and burned out and he decided it would be best to cut his losses and return home. Paul was adamant that this time they weren't taking this slacker with them.

This setback was a defining moment in John Mark's life. Instead of allowing his setback to determine the course of his life he allowed God to build him. This setback was the beginning of a genuine work of the Spirit in Mark's life. Some years later while the apostle Paul was in prison at Rome knowing that he would soon have his head decapitated wrote, "*Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful (profitable) to me in my ministry*" (2 Tim.4:9-11). Mark turned from being a deserter and quitter to becoming profitable.

This very same John Mark is the author of the gospel attributed to his name. I find it very interesting that in all four of the gospel accounts Mark is the only one to mention that Jesus specifically told the women to tell Peter to meet Him in Galilee. I believe this is because Mark knew what it as like to have a setback and he wanted to emphasize for everyone who would read his gospel that setbacks can turned into comebacks!

3. Your setback is a setup for a comeback.

We need to learn to change our perspective when faced with setbacks. We need a Divine perspective. Instead of seeing setbacks as negative we need to begin to see them as positive. When adversity comes into your life God is just setting you up for a comeback. The cross is just a setup for a resurrection. When God views your setbacks He already sees a comeback in your future. The point is this: when faced with trouble the very presence of trouble means that a comeback is inevitable. So when trouble and adversity come we can begin to rejoice because we know that something good is right around the corner. Your trouble is just a setup!

Repeatedly Jesus talked about the cross. But not only did He talk about the cross He talked about the resurrection. Jesus knew that if there was a cross there had to be a resurrection. Your financial setback is just a setup for a financial comeback. Your demotion is just a setup for a promotion, etc. Your failure is just a set up for success. Now let me prove this from Scripture, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers"* (Lk.22:31).

Do you see what Jesus is saying here? He knew Peter was going to fail; He knew Peter was going to have a major setback but He already saw Peter's comeback in the future. In other words Jesus was saying Peter I know you are going to fail but your failure is just a setup for a comeback! Jesus told Peter that when he came through this that he was going to be stronger than ever and that he would strengthen his brothers. The Lord is saying to you today that when you come through this setback you are going to be stronger than ever and He is going to use you to strengthen your brothers and sisters. No matter what your setback remember that God is setting you up for the greatest comeback of your life. Consider Job. He had everything going his way and in one day lost it all. But it was just a setup. Job made a comeback and in the end he had more than he had in the beginning. Joseph was thrown into a pit and forced into slavery and then framed for rape and spent years in prison. But it was just a setup for a comeback. Joseph would soon be second-in-command over all of Egypt.

Conclusion: If you will heed this message today this may just be the beginning of a turn around in your life. The setbacks that you face

today can be turned into a comeback tomorrow! If you will remember that your setback doesn't have to be fatal, that your setback helps make you profitable for the Kingdom of God and that your setback is a setup for your comeback you will see God turn it around. This Easter it's time for your comeback!