

Have you ever really failed at anything? Perhaps in your work or in your marriage or in school or some other endeavor? Do you lie awake at night and recount the things you wish you had not said and had not done? **You are not alone.**

Did you know that the great American patriot, Paul Revere, was once court martialled for BEING A COWARD? In 1778 Paul Revere commanded a battalion of soldiers who attempted to take over the British stronghold in Maine. The invasion was a complete failure, costing lives and ships. Revere was accused of mutiny and cowardice. Although he was cleared of all charges against him, Paul Revere was dismissed from the military with his reputation soiled. **BUT HE NEVER FULLY CLEARED HIS NAME.**

Failure is part of life. Everyone messes up at one time or another. Everyone comes up short. Everyone has his or her embarrassments.

What has failure got to do with Palm Sunday? At first glance it might seem like they are not related at all. AFTER ALL, PALM SUNDAY IS THE CELEBRATION OF JESUS' VICTORIOUS ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM. See the children spreading garments at the feet of his donkey. Hear the joyous voices crying, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" Feel the great anticipation of the crowd.

Near the end of the Second World War, American glider pilot Marion Case was captured during the invasion of Holland. Case was sent to a war camp in Germany. He was placed in a barbed-wired area by snarling German shepherds. He noticed the emaciated inmates, mostly Frenchmen, devouring chocolate bars distributed by the Red Cross. Suddenly someone pointed to the American flag on Case's sleeve, and great JOY swept through the camp: at long last, here was living proof of the much-rumored arrival of American troops in Europe. The starving men showered Case and the other captives in his group with their candy bars. The guards yelled "Halt!" But like the ticker tape in a parade, the candy bars continued to rain down on the American pilots. The Germans opened fire, killing two of the French prisoners at point-blank range. Still, the candy bars kept coming. Case and his comrades screamed "Stop! Stop!" And finally, the jubilant prisoners stopped. **Case, 50 years afterward, still flinches recalling this suicidal act of defiance on the part of those prisoners in that camp.**

My guess is that the residents of Jerusalem greeted Jesus with that same kind of desperate enthusiasm the first Palm Sunday. Instead of chocolate bars, they waved palm branches.

They greeted Jesus as a "DELIVER-ER" -- not from the power of sin, but from the power of Rome. Nowhere in the Roman empire was there more resentment at ROMAN CONTROL than in the sacred city of the Jews. **Here came their new King, the one who would lead them to VICTORY over their despised enemy.** Thus, Jesus was accompanied by a jubilant PARADE of admirers, disciples and well-wishers as he made his way into the Holy City. **It was a day of victory. But that is only one parade.**

A SECOND PARADE IS HELD A FEW DAYS LATER AS JESUS MAKES THAT LONG TREK UP A HILL CALLED GOLGOTHA" THE SKULL.

The first parade smacked of VICTORY.

This second one smacks of DEFEAT.

This time there is no hosannas. The women who follow after their condemned Master are weeping. The eerie sound of wailing is heard. Faces are grim. The crowds had been given a choice between releasing a terrorist, **Barrabbas**, and releasing their "king," **Jesus. They chose Barrabbas.** How much lower in public esteem can you get than that? If there was any redeeming quality in this second parade, no one could see it.

One nice thing for us, though: **MOST OF US CAN IDENTIFY MORE EASILY WITH THE SECOND PARADE THAN WITH THE FIRST.** Few of us will have crowds throwing garments down before us and waving palm branches and praising our name. Our picture won't be on the cover of TIME. Peter Jennings won't announce our name as ABC's

person of the week. Few of us will be invited to dine at the White House. **But all of us do know what it is to FAIL. It's sad. We don't appreciate how important failure is.**

ANYONE WHO ACCOMPLISHES ANYTHING SIGNIFICANT IN LIFE IS GOING TO FAIL. That's a given.

Anyone who attempts to do anything significant in life is going to mess up. SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THAT AND THUS DO NOT LET SETBACKS DETER THEM.

Jack Matson, a University of Houston professor, developed a course his students dubbed "**Failure 101.**" Matson deliberately had his class build ice-cream-stick mockups of products no one would buy. "***They designed hamster hot tubs and kites to fly in hurricanes,***" says Matson. The ideas were ridiculous, but once Matson's students equated failure with innovation instead of defeat, they felt free to try anything. **Since most students would have at least five failures before finding their business niche, they learned not to take failure as the LAST WORD. Says Matson, "They learned to reload and get ready to shoot again."**

Benjamin Barber operates according to a similar philosophy. Barber teaches political science at Rutgers University. He also writes novels, composes music, choreographs, lectures all over the world, and thinks deeply about things that interest him. **When he was asked about the difference between success and failure, he answered that *he doesn't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures, those who make it or those who don't.* He divides the world into "LEARNERS & NON-LEARNERS.**

There are people who learn, who are open to what happens around them, who listen, who hear the lessons. When they do something stupid, they don't do it again. And when they do something that works a little bit, they do it even better and harder the next time.

The question to ask is: *not whether you are a SUCCESS OR A FAILURE, but whether you are a LEARNER OR A NON-LEARNER.*

Indeed, there are some successful people who have learned to welcome failure because they learn more from their failures than from their successes. TWO PARADES!!

One had all the earmarks of a success; the other, all the earmarks of total failure. **IT ALL GOES TO PROVE THAT THE LINE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DRAW.** Sometimes when we think we have succeeded greatly; our victory turns out to be a setback. Seeming defeats, on the other hand, can sometimes be successes.

When President Lincoln finished his famous Gettysburg address and sat down, a reporter leaned toward him and asked, "***Is that all?***" Edward Everett, the main speaker, expressed his disappointment, as did a number of other men on the platform with Lincoln that day. Lincoln later asked not to discuss his speech. "***I failed, I failed,***" ***he said, "and that is about all that can be said about it."*** The president likewise rejected the attempts of others to encourage him about the speech as they returned with him by train to Washington. Not until the press and public had loudly praised Lincoln's address would the effect of his own doubts and the doubts of his early critics pass away.

What is success? What is Failure? What is Weakness?" What is strength?

Remember St. Paul's famous boasts in I Corinthians 2? Instead of boasting about his strengths, he boasts about his WEAKNESSES. What does he say? "*...a thorn was given me in the flesh, . . . to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*"

What does he mean? -- God's power is made perfect in weakness? Perhaps an experience that Tony Campolo had, can help us better understand his point. Tony was asked to be a counselor in a junior high camp. **He says, "everybody ought to be a counselor at a junior high camp. A junior high kid's concept of a good time, Tony says, is picking on people"** And in this particular case, at this particular camp, there was a little boy who was suffering from cerebral palsy. **His name was Billy. And they picked on him.**

As Billy walked across the camp with his uncoordinated body the other kids would line up and imitate his grotesque movements. Tony watched him one day as he was asking for direction. "**Which ... way is ... the ... craft ... shop?**" he stammered, his mouth contorting. And the boys mimicked in that same awful stammer, "**It's ... over ... there ... Billy.**" And then they laughed at him. Tony was irate.

Tony's outcry reached its highest pitch on Thursday morning. **It was Billy's cabin's turn to give devotions.** Tony wondered what would happen, because they had appointed Billy to be the speaker. **Tony knew that they just wanted to get Billy up there to make fun of him.** As Billy dragged his way to the front, you could hear the giggles rolling over the crowd. **It took him almost five minutes to say seven words. These were the words:**

"Jesus ... loves ... me ... and ... I ... love ... Jesus."

When Billy finished, there was dead silence. Tony looked over his shoulder and saw junior high boys bawling all over the place. A revival broke out in that camp after Billy's short testimony.

Now, as Tony travels all over the world, he finds missionaries and preachers who say, "**Remember me? I was converted at that junior high camp.**" The counselors had tried everything to get those kids interested in Jesus, says Tony. They even imported baseball players whose batting averages had gone up since they had started praying. **But God chose not to use the superstars. He chose a kid with cerebral palsy.**

What is Strength? What is Weakness? What is Success? What is Failure? Sometimes you don't know for a long, long time.

In Jesus' case, SUCCESS came on the third day. The parade that had FAILURE written all over it was a prelude to God's VICTORY over sin and death.

That **PARADE** was the one up to Golgotha. The one that marched right through the rolled away stone door of an empty tomb.

For many people the **TRUTH OF THE CROSS** can take a lifetime or more.

Do you have a failure in your life? Some embarrassment, some secret shame? **God's power is made perfect in WEAKNESS-because of His Son's gift of FORGIVENESS.** SO, rather than letting that FAILURE DEFEAT YOU, why not turn it over to God and let Jesus, his Son, OVERCOME IT ---**SO THAT YOU CAN ENJOY THE VICTORY OF EASTER THIS YEAR!! Amen.**