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A Rejection of Eternal Impact

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The “happiness app” Goodable on Jan. 22 shared a thread of stories about famous people in sports, entertainment, business, science and art who overcame rejection to achieve greatness.

Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest basketball player of all time, didn’t initially make his high school team. Singer Beyonce lost the talent show “Star Search.” Billionaire Jeff Bezos struggled to raise money for his startup Amazon. Physics whiz Albert Einstein dropped out of school. And revered artist Vincent van Gogh sold a whopping one painting to a friend while he lived.

Goodable described those stories and a half-dozen more as “the most famous rejections in the world” by people who later trans-formed history. They forgot the best example, one with eternal consequences for mankind — the rejection of Jesus Christ.

The rejection wasn’t immediate. Jesus amazed his first known audience, in part because He was only 12 years old as He listened to teachers in the Jerusalem temple and asked them questions (Luke 2:41-51). The people of Galilee praised Jesus as He started his three-year ministry (Luke 4:14-15), and disciples eagerly followed Him (John 1:35-51; Luke 5:1-11, 27-32).

But the Messiah felt the sting of rejection soon enough. It was actually inevitable. As prophesied in Isaiah 53:3, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

The first taste of rejection came in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. While the people in the synagogue there initially admired His “gracious words,” they also dismissed Him as “the carpenter” and eventually turned hostile. “They got up and drove Him out of the city, and brought Him to the crest of the hill on which their city had been built, so that they could throw Him down from the cliff” (Mark 6:1-6, Luke 4:16-30).

That early encounter was a foretaste of many rejections to come.

The Gadarenes begged Jesus to leave their region after He cast demons into a herd of pigs that then ran into the sea (Matthew 8:28-34). The people probably viewed Jesus as a threat to their livelihoods. In similar fashion, the rich young ruler walked away when Jesus counseled him to sell everything he had, donate his wealth to the poor and follow Jesus (19:16-22).

All of them were unwilling to make the core sacrifice required for discipleship: “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself,” Jesus said (Luke 9:23-26). Other people initially demonstrated that level of commitment but later rejected Jesus. Many disciples in Capernaum, for instance, forsook Him because of His “unpleasant” teaching about being the bread of life (John 6:41-66).

No one rebuffed Christ more than the Jewish leaders of His day — those who should have eagerly embraced Him as the fulfillment of a generations-long promise to the Israelites. Not content with mere rejection, the Pharisees in particular hounded Jesus in an effort to undermine Him.

They grilled Him about eating with sinners (Luke 5:29-32), casting out demons (Luke 11:14-23), violating the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14), ignoring Jewish customs (Mark 7:1-13), and punishing adultery (John 8:1-11). On one occasion, Jesus silenced not only the Pharisees but also the Sadducees and the scribes as they sought to entrap Him with trick questions (Matthew 22:15-46).

From the outset, many Jewish leaders had one goal — killing Jesus. In God's time, and according to His plan, that is exactly what they did. They orchestrated the ultimate rejection of the Son of God with Roman consent. In His final hours, Jesus also had to endure the betrayal by Judas (John 13:21-30), repeated denials by Peter (John 18:15-27) and abandonment by His most loyal disciples (Mark 14:27, 49-50).

The high achievers from history who made Goodable's list all did some-thing significant to earn such praise, but their successes pale in comparison to the feat Jesus accomplished. After three days in the tomb, He conquered death.

"Why are you seeking the living One among the dead?" an angel told the women at the tomb. "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead" (Luke 24:5-7).

Even more noteworthy is what Jesus' triumph meant for mankind. Jesus said He would draw all nations to Him by way of the cross (John 12:30-32), and Paul later expounded upon the significance of Jesus conquering death. "For since by a man death came, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead," Paul wrote. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

No one else will ever transform history more than that.

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Discouraged, Disappointed, Disenchanted, Disconnected, Disillusioned, Disheartened, Disengaged

- by Jonathan Perz

When one's expectations for local churches full of imperfect people drive their faith, they often end up facing one if not all of these "D's." I talk to so many who have walked away because they are hurt by the church. Yet their greater challenge is that they place too much emphasis on and have unrealistic expectations for a local church. Their faith is largely rooted in the local church and not in the Lord. So, when the local church fails, as it will, their faith falters.

Local churches will struggle, face challenges, and fall short (read Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 for a synopsis of failings of local first century churches). In a perfect world, local churches would never disappoint. But we live in a sinful world, and churches at their best are made up of struggling sinners who are forgiven. Still, Satan tempts and Christians succumb. Church members thus don't always say the right things or act the right ways. Therefore it is critical to ensure our faith is always rooted in He who will never fail us and He who will never disappoint us.

For those out there struggling to rekindle their faith and recover from their hurt, I point you to Jesus. Remember why you love and follow Him. Then you will have a basis upon which to love and labor with His imperfect, struggling people - the church. It also serves well to recall that the church we will gather with in heaven will not be made up of struggling imperfect souls, but those who were victorious. There will be no sin there. So, with that as our hope, let us rekindle our love for the Lord and His people, putting our trust primarily in Him as we strive to encourage one another to reach home.

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