

# Righteous Risk Takers

## Various Scriptures

I am writing or rewriting these sermons from my bed. My footnotes and attributions are a little on the light side. That is, non-existent. All I can say about this sermon is that I once read a book by John Piper called "Don't Waste Your Life". It inspired the following thoughts. (Dec 2009)

Woody Allan once said, "It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens." I am not afraid to die, but I am afraid (if "afraid" is the right word) of wasting my life. I am afraid for my children. I fear that they may grow up to waste their lives. I am afraid lest any of the folk over which I have exercised pastoral oversight waste their lives. The antidote to fear is faith. I trust God that I, my children, and all those that I love will learn to be righteous risk takers for God. This is the path to living a life that really matters.



## ONLY ONE CERTAINTY IN LIFE

Someone said only two things in life are certain: death and taxes. Someone else commented, of the two, death doesn't get worse every year.



All joking aside, one thing that being suddenly and unexpectedly diagnosed with cancer reminds you of is that there are few certainties in life. James warns us: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15).

None of us knows how long we have got. We make plans, but they can so easily come to nothing.

The one thing that we do know is that we will die (unless Jesus comes first) and we will all be called to account for the way we have lived our lives (Hebrews 9:27). As with any "exam" the wise will prepare in advance. Since we have all sinned (Romans 3:23), and the "wages" of sin is death (Romans 6:23a), the only way to prepare for your last and most important "test" is to accept the free gift of God which is forgiveness and eternal life in the world to come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23b). There is no condemnation for those that are in Christ (Romans 8:1). Anyone who will accept Jesus as Lord, as proven by his resurrection from the dead, and call upon him for salvation will be saved (Romans 10:9-13). This is the one bedrock certainty I can give you in this life.

## WHAT KIND OF LIFE REALLY MATTERS?

The movers and shakers of this world realise that life is full of uncertainty. They are prepared to risk all in pursuit of fame and fortune. Others seek after pleasure. Many "ordinary" people hope to find fulfilment along the same path. They may see work as a means to an end: bigger houses, faster cars, more gadgets. But money can seem to grow wings and fly away (I once had a poster on my wall that said, "Money talks, but all mine ever says is 'Goodbye.'"). Things decay. Even a Cadillac will end up in the junk yard. None of it will last. Those who pursue pleasure as the ultimate end of human existence may see work as a burden, an unfortunate interruption between the pleasure seeking that characterises most people's "teen years" and the longed for goal of "retirement" where we can go back to doing what we please. But is this really what life is all about? To live life, even a long life, a cancer free life, solely in pursuit of material possessions or even in pursuit of pleasure for its own sake is, ultimately, meaningless (Read Ecclesiastes!).

**Risk is a part of life. To really make something of our lives we need to be willing to take risks and live with uncertainty – even the possibility of failure. But if you are going to risk all, risk all for something that matters. Risk it all for God. Become a "Righteous Risk Taker".**

## BETTER TO LOSE YOUR LIFE THAN WASTE IT

It is better to lose your life than to waste it. Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating suicide. I'm advocating doing something for God, something that will last, something that matters, whatever the cost. Here are a few of my favourite biblical examples of "Righteous Risk Takers":

### Joab

In the days of King David, a coalition of Ammonites and Arameans came against Israel (2 Samuel 10). With the enemy drawn up in front and behind of him, Joab, commander of Israel's army, knew that the situation was perilous. He divided his forces, putting the bulk under command of his brother Abishai. Then he said, "Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight." (2 Samuel 10:12). Joab does not presume upon God. He does not know whether the Lord will preserve his life. But he relished the opportunity to risk all, to do something great for the Lord, and trusts that "the Lord will do what is good in his sight." (2 Samuel 10:12).



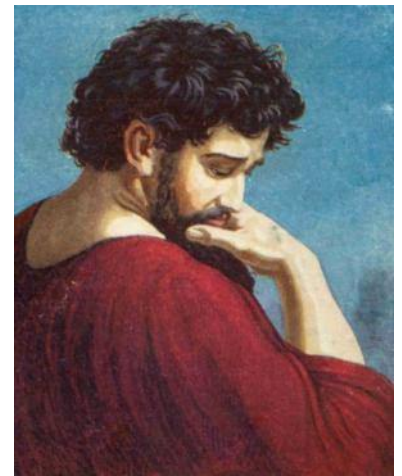
### Esther

When Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire, Mordecai went to Queen Esther to request that she petition the king on behalf of the people. Esther had an opportunity to do something great for the Lord. But to enter into the king's presence without being summoned was to risk death. In full knowledge of the fact that she is putting her life on the line, Esther instructs Mordecai: "Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16). Again, Esther does not presume upon God. She does not know whether the Lord will preserve her life. But she relishes the opportunity to risk all, to do something great for the Lord, and says only "... if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16).



### Paul

As part of the climax of his missionary career, Paul was making one last journey up to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that he would be bound and carried away should he go up to Jerusalem. Paul's friends tried to dissuade him from going. "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?" says Paul. "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). Luke comments, "When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done'" (Acts 21:14).



Paul too was prepared to give up his life if necessary to fulfil his God-given calling, to make his life count for eternity, to do something that really matters for God.

### Israel in the Wilderness

A sad contrast with all that has gone before is seen in the story of the "Wilderness Generation" (Numbers 13 and 14). A whole generation of Israelites, unwilling to be "Righteous Risk Takers", failed to enter into the Promised Land. They had a chance to do something great for God. Instead they died in the desert. John Piper said something along the lines of, "Fleeing from righteous risk, for fear of loss, is the shortest path to a wasted life – don't waste your life." How true.



## CONCLUSION

**Make your life count for something. Follow the example of Joab, of Esther, of Paul, of Jesus himself. Do something great for God, whatever the cost. Become a "Righteous Risk Taker".**

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