

July 21st – “Gettin’ Defencive About Disheartenment (Lose Heart for Justice)

Introduction – Cheating has become a national epidemic in marriages, in schools, in sports, in politics, at work, as a matter of fact it has become so commonplace it is now the “new normal”. What that means is that the impetus has shifted from justice to justification. Instead of expecting justice in which the wrong are exposed and held accountable, we expect wrong behavior to be justified and excused while we seek the therapy we need to adapt and adjust to it. This can lead to a form of disheartenment which can take hold of us in deeply disturbing ways. In extreme cases, it can lead to PTSD or depression.

The real danger is we might be losin’ our heart for justice. When we are the victim of someone cheating, in whatever circumstance, we can lose our trust in the ultimate justice of God placed in Christ...*“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.”* (Matthew 12:18-21)

So Justice isn’t just an individual thing, it is a civilization thing and if we lose our trust in justice and we quit fighting for justice as expressed through Jesus, we risk losing more than just a game, or argument, or marriage, or political race, or scholarship, we lose the very integrity of our culture which is the glue that holds us all together. That is why Paul could say; *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2nd Corinthians 4:16-18)...*For we live by faith, not by sight...*So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2nd Corinthians 5:7,10)*

Justice is a Jesus thing, and cheating is a Satan thing and that is why the devil cheats at every turn in those who surrender to him to create chaos in your life. Paul makes clear that we must keep our focus on the unseen eternal justice of Jesus in which all will be held accountable. So we live daily by faith in justice, not by the sight of injustice by making it our goal to please God no matter what anyone else is doing because in the end we all will get what we are due, good or bad. This is not just about us getting personal justice for our temporary struggles. It is like Solomon said in Proverbs 14:13-14; *Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief. The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good rewarded for theirs.*

The bible makes it clear that when we feel like we are losing heart, the temptation is to think it is just about us, but injustice in which people cheat to get what they want and get away with it is a global killer. The only thing that stands in the way of this Extinction Life Event is those believers in Christ willing to become Jesus’ Justice Warriors. Paul says of us; *“we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”* When the victim of cheating it is natural to lose heart, to give up because it seems the one not playing fairly is winning the game. Not only are they not winning, but they are destroying the game for they have no respect for it.

That is why the whole institution of marriage is at risk because the unfaithful cheaters not only cheat but have no respect for what their infidelity does to the sanctity of marriage for their own children. Same is true of the 95% of those surveyed who say they have cheated at school to get ahead, including the 62% who admit to plagiarizing and embellishing. But what do we expect when those like Lori Loughlin (aunt Becky) bribed school officials with \$500,000 to get her daughters into USC.

As Jesus Justice Warriors, we do not lose heart, we don't cheat, we set for the truth plainly to challenge the cheaters by reminding them they will answer to God sooner than later, and we do that by remaining honest and true to the process. If we begin to lose heart, if we become so disheartened that we give up on justice, we need to call on the help of our linebackers. We sometimes forget that we are backed up by some of the greatest linebackers of all time. These linebackers are the combination of Dick Butkus and Michael Singletary and Brian Urlacher. We talked about them recently as the heroes of faith. They were the incredible examples of those who lived by faith, not by sight. They surround us, back us up, they shout encouragement to us through the ages to never give up, to fight hard. Their stories inspire us to believe despite what we might see that God will reward those who earnestly seek Him. The Hebrew writer says; **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)**

Why do we have this cloud of witnesses, why do we focus on being Jesus' Justice Warriors; so that we will not grow weary and lose heart. We must fix our eyes on Jesus who endured cheating and lying and infidelity and hatred and rejection, but he remained faithful and received his "right" reward. So shall we, if we process or reprocess the events in which those who cheat us as tests of our character in Christ. What others do may be unfair, evil, vile, destructive, but we should never legitimize their disrespect for the process by losing heart. If we can't or won't stand up against those who cheat, we encourage them to continue to do so.

Most of us also have family/friend linebackers too. We are blessed with parents or spouses or kids or loyal friends who have our back no matter what. They may not be able to stop the cheating, but they will never stop encouraging us to stay strong, to hang in there. They believe in us, and they want what is best for us. What do you think I am? My very purpose in life is to back you up.

So we have learned that we cannot lose heart as we are part of Jesus' ministry against injustice in this world. We don't lose heart because we know whatever cheating we endured is only temporal. We don't lose heart because we are backed up by the cloud of witness, Jesus, our family, friends, and pastor. But there is one more thing we must consider when it comes disheartenment... **And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our**

good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

Here we go again. We are to endure through hardships by seeing them as part of God's refining process for us. We are to demystify the power of those who cheat us by recognizing they are simple fools used by Satan to destroy us, but God is using what they intend to harm to accomplish good. When Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, they lied to their father and presented that blood-stained coat of colors as proof. Not only did Joseph get a raw deal from them, but then Potiphar and the cupbearer stabbed him in the back. But Joseph didn't lose heart, he put it all in perspective and wisely proclaimed; **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)** It is God who disciplines us for our good even when the discipline at the time is unpleasant and can be downright painful. But if we refuse to be disheartened and accept the evil aimed at us as something God can turn into good, it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for us.

There are a few devastating circumstances which we can't just reframe with the perspective of Joe. Death of a loved one, debilitating diseases, dark depression can be the severe experiences that require another layer of support. We will look deeper into those next week. But more often for most it is the conniving and conspiratorial efforts of those with which they are involved meant to dishearten them that creates the daily anxiety and developing mistrust that good will prevail.

Remember the old saying; "cheaters never prosper?" We really want to believe that, but many of us have given up the battle to stand firm in Jesus Justice. It all started on the playground, then graduated to the battlegrounds of marriage, work, politics, even religion. God will not rest until victory is brought through justice and in the name of Christ and we all put our hope in it. Our little battles against injustice are part of the greater war fought by Christ Jesus for freedom and justice for all. There will always be cheaters who seem to prosper, but God has a greater army of justice warriors who will stand up for right and demand we all respect the game. If you have been losing heart of late, it could be that you are confused about the nature of why God allows suffering into our lives. Even if it is intended to hurt us by those who cause it, God converts that suffering into clarity of cause for us. It should always be clear to us that our cause for Christ is to resist cheating and injustice, and the most powerful tool we have against it is integrity. **For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2nd Corinthians 10:3-5)**

Those who would advocate for cheating to be the "new normal" are also those who admit that those cheated upon must be the "bigger person" and rise above the situation through adaptation, but not for the purpose of justice. We must allow those who cheat to justify their sin by accommodating them as proof of our grace by indulging their greed. This is not Jesus Justice. Jesus Justice is when we repel the dishonest with honesty, the cheaters with integrity, and injustice with justice. This is our true power over any circumstance which is used to dishearten us.