

“Is Your Life On Hold?”

Matthew 6:24-34

Series: The Story Chapter 24 No Ordinary Man

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Perhaps you’ve heard the story of the man who stumbled in the dark and fell over the edge of a cliff. During his fall he managed to grab a tree branch and hold on for dear life. Until that moment he did not believe in God. Yet now, circumstances being what they were, he decided it couldn’t hurt to ask for help. In desperation he cried out, “If there’s anyone up there, please help me.” To his complete surprise, a Voice replied. It said, “I am here.” The man asked, “What should I do?” The Voice replied, “Let go.” The man thought about it for a minute and said, “Is there anyone else up there?”

No response came. Finally, when his strength gave out, he realized there was nothing left for him but to face his dreadful fate. He closed his eyes, let go...and instantly hit the ground only a few feet below him.

Is your life on hold?

There are two possible meanings to that question. In the first case something is holding on to you. It prevents your life from moving forward. You feel stuck. You are waiting for your life to begin or perhaps to get back on track. You have a severe case of what I call “Tiligetoutta.” You say to yourself, “I can’t wait tiligetoutta school.” “I can’t wait tiligetoutta my parents control and get a place of my own.” “I can’t wait tiligetoutta the single life and find someone to love me.” “I can’t wait tiligetoutta the diaper phase or I get these kids outta the house.” “I can’t wait tiligetoutta this stressful, life-draining job.” “I can’t wait tiligetoutta...” you fill in the blank. Something is holding on to you. Someone is keeping your life on hold.

There’s a second meaning to the question: “Is your life on hold?” In this case you are holding on to something or someone.

- You are holding on to a resentment. You’ve been nursing a grudge, balancing a chip on your shoulder, hanging on to a bit of righteous indignation or justified anger.
- You are holding on to a desire. It might be lust for a person. It might be longing for alcohol, pot or pain killers. It might be hungering for food to comfort and cover the pain.
- You are holding on to stuff. You like to accumulate things because they make you feel better about yourself. You want to have more money because it makes you feel valuable or secure.
- You are holding on to judgments about other people because they allow you to distance yourself from them and elevate yourself above them.
- You are holding on to self-pity because it feels good to feel sorry for yourself.
- You are holding on to control because if you can just get the people and the circumstances in your life to follow your will everything will be fine.

All of us hold on to something or someone. We are like the man in my story, dangling on the edge, desperately holding on. Why? Two reasons: Pride tells us we must do this. Fear warns us

what will happen if we don't. Pride tells us we are the master of our own destiny. Fear tells us we dare not lose control. Yet it's getting harder to hold on.

Then a Voice from above comes to us with a different direction: Let go. We hear the Voice of God through the Word of God, Jesus Christ. Ordinary people hold on to things. Jesus tells us to do the opposite of ordinary. The title of this week's chapter in *The Story* is "No Ordinary Man." Jesus is not ordinary. He's extraordinary. Today, even those who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Savior, the Lord, God Incarnate, still respect His teachings. That, in itself, is extraordinary. Consider the fact that this man, who never wrote a book, has sold more Bibles and books and inspired more writers of books than anyone in history. This construction worker who never went to college has laid the foundation for more universities than anyone else. This rabbi from Nazareth who never had a synagogue has been quoted more times than any other human. And His influence shows no sign of slowing. John Ortberg, in his book *Who is This Man?* puts it this way:

Normally when someone dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to recede. As I write this, our world marks the passing of digital innovator Steve Jobs. Someone wrote that ten years ago our world had Bob Hope, Johnny Cash, and Steve Jobs. Now we have no Jobs, no Cash, and no Hope.

(To which I add: Please God, save Kevin Bacon)

But Jesus inverted this normal human trajectory, as He has so many others. Jesus' impact was greater a hundred years after His death than during His life; it was greater still after five hundred years; after a thousand years His legacy laid the foundation for much of Europe; after two thousand years He has more followers than ever.

What is so extraordinary about Jesus' teachings? For one thing He taught the deep Truth of God not with complex, abstract, theological terminology, but through simple stories we call parables. He used seeds and weeds, sheep and goats, salt and light, fish and nets to reveal the profound mystery of God's will. He told us about His Father through the stories of a wedding reception in the parable of the Great Feast, roadside assistance in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and a broken family in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

In addition to being a Master Storyteller, Jesus taught us principles in the Sermon on the Mount on how to live the best and blessed life. Yet Jesus wasn't just talk. He lived His lessons. He taught by example. In every action He displays grace and compassion as He feeds five thousand hungry stomachs, touches the untouchable leper, opens the eyes of blind beggars, restores a tear-stained lady of the evening, eats with the outcasts, raises up a dead girl, and washes the smelly feet of His disciples. Jesus taught by stories, by principles and by examples.

There are many ways to summarize His teachings. I believe His first words say it best: After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15)

The main focus of Jesus' teaching is the Kingdom of God. Let me begin by saying this is no ordinary Kingdom. It has no borders because it's found in every land. It has no barriers because it includes people of every race. It has no capital city, no army, no infrastructure, no taxation, no hierarchy, no laws. Where is the Kingdom of God? Jesus says "it's near." What does that mean? It's not only up in heaven, it's here on earth. It's not only after you die, but while you still live. The Kingdom of God is wherever the King is. And where is the King? Jesus' last words in the Gospel of Matthew are, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). If Jesus the King is everywhere, then His Kingdom is everywhere – everywhere someone calls Him King.

That is the first truth Jesus taught: to be in His Kingdom, **Make Jesus Your King**. Now that may be a problem for many Americans. After all, we fought a war to get rid of a king. We declared our independence. The first thing the people of New York City did after the public reading of the Declaration of Independence was to knock down the lead statue of King George III and turn it into bullets. Typical New Yorkers. Why would we want to enslave ourselves to another king?

The real choice is not between a king and no king. The real question is which king will you follow? Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus shows us we cannot avoid serving somebody. Who do you serve? Who receives the largest share of your time and energy, your money and attention? Who calls the shots? Is it a promotion, a possession, a pleasure, a position, a powerful person, a painful memory, popularity, pride, physical health? Not all of these are bad. They just are not meant to be your king.

Why declare Jesus your King? He is the only King who lasts when all other kings fall down. He said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:24-27)

As Hurricane Joaquin threatened the east coast this week I'm sure many who have shore homes were wondering once again, "Why did I build here?" Storms happen to everyone. This King is the only one who stands when others fall down or let you down. You can also trust Him because He is the only King who laid down His life for you and then rose up victorious.

Chris Seay tells a story about one man who changed his allegiance from a false king to the Truth King.

"One week I was preaching in our church about the kingdom that is coming, and on the way out a young man grabbed me. He said,

Pastor, the kingdom of God is already here. Every Sunday I used to be in the same neighborhood. I used to come down here to a bar called Emo's, and I'd start every night with a drop of ecstasy on my tongue and wash it down with Bicardi 151. That's what I did Sunday after Sunday. Now I come to a worship service instead, and I finish the evening with the body of Christ on my tongue, and I wash it down with the blood of Christ. This is the kingdom of God."

Chris Seay adds, "This man is experiencing the kingdom; he lives in its presence. We may not recognize it, we don't often see it, but it is right here, and we long to get past the mundane existence of religion and get a taste of the kingdom."¹

Now ecstasy and bicardi may not be your kings. But even good kings are not as good as the best King, the eternal King, the only King who can help you stand in a storm: Jesus. Is He your King?

The second truth of Jesus' teaching is to **Let Go**. Jesus uses the word "repent" which literally means "to change one's mind." It's also translated as a turnaround, a u-turn, a change in direction and a change in life. Over Labor Day weekend I rode my bike on the canal towpath in New Jersey. I was north of Frenchtown when I noticed the gravel path turned to a narrow dirt trail. The forest closed in on me. Something told me I took a wrong turn but I refused to change. I kept going until the path almost disappeared. Then it stopped at a chain link fence. On the fence was a sign bearing these words: "Superfund Site. Warning: hazardous materials present at this site. No trespassing." At that point I repented, did a u-turn, changed direction and let go of going my way.

Once Jesus is your King, you change your mind and your direction. You let go of going your way and doing things your way and you begin to do what He says. One way to summarize all His teachings is to let go.

- Let go of anger, resentment and grudges –Matthew 5:21-26
- Let go of lusts and desires – Matthew 5:27-30
- Let go of impressing and pleasing people – Matthew 6:1-18
- Let go of running after money and stuff – Matthew 6:19-24
- Let go of worry and fear – Matthew 6:25-34
- Let go of judgment and prejudice – Matthew 7:1-5
- Let go of selfishness – Matthew 16:24-26

This list can turn your soul into a toxic superfund site. So why is it so hard for us to let go? Like the man clinging to the tree, we think we have to hold on to these things or we will die.

¹ Chris Seay, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Thomas Nelson, 2011), p. 22.

Sometimes it takes reaching the end of our strength and the end of ourselves to finally give up, let go and do what God says. When we do, we discover we don't die. In fact, we fall into the hands of our Heavenly Father. Jesus says this:

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:31-33)

Put God first and everything else will fall into its proper place. Let go and fall into His embrace, His amazing grace.

Jesus says the last step in the process is to **Be The Good News**. Jesus says, "believe the Good News." The word "believe" does not mean you merely agree with your head. It means you trust in it, you surrender yourself to it. In a sense – you become embraced by it and part of it. You become a character in God's Story. You become Good News. When you make Jesus your King, let go and follow Him, He starts to write a new life-story for you. The Bible calls Jesus "the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15). When we give our lives to Him, He writes for us a life story that never ends.

Woodside exists for this purpose: to share God's love Story with as many people as possible. Since we opened our new building in 2009, we've seen Jesus write countless life-changing stories. If these walls could talk they would tell you hundreds of stories about VBS children, Adventure Club kids, Junior and Senior High students, homeless, hungry and addicted neighbors, Growth Group members, morning and evening worshipers in Yardley and Parkland whose lives have been transformed forever by God's Good News. They have let go and let King Jesus turn their lives into Good News. In countless ways you use this building to Share God's Story with others.

Over the next three weeks you will hear me speak about the Share the Story growth campaign. Our goal, over the next three years, is to eliminate the \$1.3 million mortgage left on this building and to give away 10% of what you give to missions. Why get rid of the mortgage? After all, people pay their mortgage for 30 years. We've already paid over \$700,000 in interest and we'll have to pay at least another \$200,000 in interest if we let it keep going. Your generous offerings should be invested not in interest but in people, in Sharing God's Story with more people, in helping people receive a life-changing Story. This is not about bricks and mortar, interest and mortgages. This is about people – helping everyone let go and let King Jesus write them a life story that goes on forever.

Over the next few weeks, please pray about what God would have you give to Share the Story. Join us for the week of prayer October 19 to 24.

