

## **Noah's Ark: A Lesson from the Snail and the Cheetah**

Genesis 7:1-9

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Is there anybody that doesn't like to win?

I married a person that loves to win. You wouldn't know that about my wife unless you played a game with her.

It could be cards, dominoes, hop scotch, or marbles. Whatever the games are, she wants to win. We've got a bowl full of marbles she took from some poor children when she was a little girl. Too bad people stopped paying that game or we could have gone in the marble business.

Somebody needs to teach her how to play Poker, just for fun, not for money. That could certainly be addicting, but I don't think she has a Poker face. It lights too much when she knows she's going to win and she when she does, you'd think she won the Lottery.

I can see her now in a retirement home playing Bingo. Some of the people playing are asleep. Tina sees that the lady beside her isn't using her card so she says, "If you aren't going to play that card do you mind if I play it?" Then when she wins she yells "Bingo" so loud she wakes up the ones who aren't playing and somebody says, "What was that?"

Somebody says, "That was just Tina having her daily dose of joy."

We all like to win, don't we? If we have a business we call it making money and hopefully producing a good product. If we have a school, it's called graduating our students with high scores and moving them into jobs and the next level of education. If it's politics is called winning the election and severing the public.

However, it seems that we've lost our way because in all these areas there are too many examples of people wanting to win at any cost.

A lot of people care precious little about integrity any more. Just as long as the business makes money, the school comes out on top, our candidate wins the elections, or our team wins the game, how it's done doesn't seem to matter.

Last year the offensive coordinator for the Louisville Cardinals received a phone call from Lonnie Galloway, the Wake Forest radio announcer and former player for the Demon Deacons.

Because of his status, Galloway had access to all the practices at Wake Forest and apparently, a grudge against the team that paid his salary. He offered some of the team's plays to the Cardinals' coach, who accepted them.

This was discovered after a sheet of their own plays was discovered by Wake Forest personnel inside the stadium the day before the game against Louisville.

Not only was there lack of integrity by Tommy Elrod in sharing the information; there was a lack of integrity by offensive coordinator Lonnie Galloway in accepting the plays.

Is winning the most important thing to us?

Is winning so important that we are willing to sacrifice health, integrity, morals, family, relationships, and our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Sometimes we need a different perspective. Let me give you one.

Each year the Treasure Valley YMCA in Boise, Idaho sponsors a YMCA Kid's Triathlon.

Two years ago, nine-year-old Noah Aldrich decided to participate, but not without his seven-year-old brother Lucas.

Lucas doesn't walk or talk. Because he was born with a rare undeveloped brain, most of his time is spent in a wheelchair and he requires assistance with the most basic of tasks.

However, just because Lucas doesn't talk doesn't mean these brothers don't communicate. They do everything together from watching cartoons to taking walks.

Participating in a triathlon with his brother meant that this boy would have to pull Lucas on a raft for the 200-meter swim, pedal the three-mile bike ride with Lucas in a trailer, and finally push Lucas in a buggy for the mile run.

Do you think Noah was concerned about winning the race?  
(<http://www.challengedathletes.org/athletes/lucas-and-noah-aldrich/>)

Of course, I am not suggesting that when we are in a competition that we should not strive to do our best and win.

Even the Apostle Paul acknowledged that when he asked: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." (I Cor. 9:24)

Even in Paul's day there was great competition in these races and in boxing competitions. When it was all over, only one person was awarded the prize. But Paul noticed something about the greenery with which the winner was crowned. It didn't last long.

For Paul that was an adequate contrast with the crown that lasts which he says we should strive for.

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like

someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor. 9:25-27)

What then is the prize that Paul is speaking about?

Paul is speaking about salvation. Paul is talking about eternal life.

But if that is true, how could we disqualify ourselves from such a prize? How could we run a race only to find out that at the end we have been disqualified from getting the prize?

In other places Paul talks about salvation being a gift. I didn't think that salvation was something that we earned.

It's not. We cannot earn it by being the best or being first in a race for heaven.

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God,” (Ephesians 2:8).

We disqualify ourselves when God isn't the one we place our faith in. The culture that we live in teaches us that there are many things more important than God and winning is one of them.

God extends grace to those who are in the right race, reaching for the right crown.

In case you haven't noticed, we worship winning. We worship winners. We even make those who finish second feel like losers and if we lose we often feel the sting and the anger of others and our self-worth drops like a rock to the bottom of the lake.

Maybe that's why Rashaan Salaam, the 1994 Heisman Trophy winner from the University of Colorado took his life last year at age 42. He played only two years in the NFL. He'd stopped stringing together winning seasons in his life and he lost hope.

Jesus designed the Kingdom of Heaven to welcome winners and losers. But more than that, he trained his disciples to think about life from a totally different perspective, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. He used this phrase on more than one occasion.

What can that possibly mean?

This phrase is recorded in Matthew after Jesus answered a very wealthy young man's question about what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

“Inherit” is a great word because if you inherit something, you don't earn it, but the man who asked the question must not have noticed the difference.

After Jesus listed many of the Ten Commandments, the man proudly said he had kept all of them. The man clearly believed he was good enough that he deserved eternal life.

But as Jesus probed further, he discovered the man was driven by greed and covetousness. He was a winner by the world's standards. Never mind how he won; he won. Isn't that all that matters?

When Jesus challenged him to give up his wealth and become a disciple, "he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Matthew 19:22).

This man was a winner by the world's standards. He was wealthy, which he didn't want to give up.

But notice the content of Jesus' message. Because this man focused on things that were temporal in nature, he found himself shut out of the house after the owner got up and closed the door.

Billy Graham wrote, "Jesus' words are a solemn warning to us that earthly success will not get us into heaven. In fact, it can get in the way by blinding us to our own sin. Only Christ can save us, and no matter who we are, we need to give our lives to Him."  
(<https://billygraham.org/answer/what-did-jesus-mean-when-he-said-the-last-would-become-first/>)

A lesson from Noah's ark is that both the snail and the cheetah made it on the ark. It wasn't a race. Both made it on the ark by the grace of God. That's what made them winners. Winning looks a bit different from that perspective, doesn't it?

A lesson from the Treasure Valley YMCA is that there is a reward for those who are in the race for others, loving others as they love themselves. The last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Two years later Noah Aldrich is still running, swimming, and biking with his brother. Winning looks a bit different when we are giving ourselves away for others.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. (Luke 24:1-2) They went to the tomb feeling the sting of death. However, when they met the resurrected Lord, victory took an entirely different perspective. Winning looks a bit different with the stone rolled away.

When Dabo Swinney coached the Clemson Tigers to the National Championship Monday night, with tears in his eyes he said, "Only God can do this."

What did he mean? Does God even care who wins a football game?

Dabo is a product of a broken home and an alcoholic father. He was a teenager when his family lost their house to foreclosure. His dad lost his business. His brother had suffered a severe brain injury in a car accident.

(<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/429571/coach-dabo-swinneys-christian-faith-he-wont-hide-it>)

He spent his senior year in high school moving from place to place. During his freshman year at the University of Alabama, his mother came to live with him on campus because she had nowhere else to go, so he shared a bedroom with her in a tiny apartment with another student. (Ibid)

His mother worked two jobs and attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings with her sons and Bible studies at coaches' homes. She watched Dabo play softball and basketball games in recreation leagues.

(<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/429571/coach-dabo-swinneys-christian-faith-he-wont-hide-it>)

That faith helped Dabo through the tough times. He was within a day of being turned out of school for failing to pay for his classes because his Pell Grant had not come through. He had not yet earned a scholarship on the football team but he was close. He got down on his knees and prayed. When he went to his mailbox he found an application from a credit card company that allowed him to open a line of credit for 1000 dollars. He was able to write two checks and enroll in school. (Ibid)

Later Gene Stallings awarded him a full scholarship on to the Alabama football team. He was a part of the 1992 national championship that shocked a seemingly invincible Miami in the Sugar Bowl. (Ibid)

Swinney spent three years as a graduate assistant with Coach Stallings who then hired him as a full-time coach in 1996. In 2000, he was fired with the rest of the Mike Dubose's staff. ([http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/14519758/dabo-swinney-overcame-pain-poverty-reach-new-heights-clemson](http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/14519758/dabo-swinney-overcame-pain-poverty-reach-new-heights-clemson))

For the next two years, Dabo worked for a commercial real estate company. Then he got a call from Clemson coach Tommy Bowden in 2003. When Bowden was fired midway through the 2008 season, Dabo was named the interim coach and then as the head coach. (Ibid)

Like the Apostle Paul said about the runners that run to get a prize that will not last, Dabo admits that he coaches to win football games because that is his job. He won the ultimate prize Monday night by winning the National Championship.

But what I admire about Dabo is that he's never shy about telling you what's most important to him is working for a crown that will last forever.

Dabo recruits the best football players. He recruits players of many faiths and players of no faith at all. But players, parents, and fans know where Dabo's allegiance lies.

Two years ago, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) faxed a letter to the office of Clemson's general counsel complaining that "Christian worship seems interwoven into Clemson's football program."

(<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/429571/coach-dabo-swinneys-christian-faith-he-wont-hide-it>)

They claimed that even optional team religious events violated the Constitution and that Swinney "sends a message of exclusion to those players on his team not in conformity with his personal religious beliefs." (Ibid)

While there are clear lines of Separation between Church and State, groups like this seek to remove all voluntary expressions of faith from universities. They try to intimidate and silence those who seek to live a life of integrity and conviction of their faith before others.

In his response to their charges Swinney wrote: "Recruiting is very personal. Recruits and their families want — and deserve — to know who you are as a person, not just what kind of coach you are. I try to be a good example to others, and I work hard to live my life according to my faith."

(Ibid)

The University backed Swinney and cited that he had done nothing wrong in the way he was leading his players. (Ibid)

If more of us were not afraid to live our lives with that kind of passion and commitment, not only would we not miss the boat, but we would be helping others understand that while we all run to get the prize, whatever that prize might be in our lives, what is most important is that we work to get a crown that will last forever.

Whether we are like the cheetah or the snail, the tiger or the elephant, the question will be the same? "Why should I let you into my kingdom?"

None of will be able to say, "It is because of my goodness, my hard work, my years of studying the Bible, all the people I have helped along the way, all the commandments I kept. It's because I've been a winner in all I've ever attempted."

No, no.

We all enter the same way. Like Noah entered the ark, we will enter heaven by God's grace through faith, lest any of us should boast. On the day when we see the heavenly prize, when it happens for us, we will be overcome with emotion. We will likely say, "Only God can do this."

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