**Chutes & Ladders #2**

Last week we kicked off a teaching series called, “Chutes and Ladders” and we introduced the idea of things in life that we sometimes assume are bad things or failures), we called them “chutes” that may actually be ladders and those things in life that we assumed would be a pathways to success, we called them “ladders” that may actually be chutes.

Tonight I want to spend a few minutes looking a little more closely at these ideas and I want to tackle what I believe to be the more difficult of the two ideas. I think we can all look through Scripture and find examples of people who had something negative happen to them that God ended up using for His good.

* Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers
* Moses feeling like he was inadequate to speak to the pharaoh because of his poor speech
* Paul being shipwrecked, beaten and imprisoned

There are bunches of examples of people who have, from the outside looking in, found themselves in some really tough situations, the kinds of situations that everyone else around them would assume was a “chute” or a “failure” or the beginning of a downward spiral that ended up being amazing success stories. Those are the accounts in Scripture that are easy to find and we’re going to look at some of those…next week.

But tonight I want to take some time to look at the opposite of that idea.

* What about those accounts in the Bible where from the outside looking in, things appeared to be great?
* What about those people that appeared to be poised for greatness and success and ended up failing?
* What about those people that appeared to be climbing the ladder with some serious speed and then ended up tumbling back down to where they started or perhaps even further down than where they began?

Let’s think for a minute about Adam and Eve. You guys are familiar with this account in the Bible right? God creates Adam, places him in what the Bible calls the garden in the east, in Eden.

God had only given Adam one stipulation. God gave Adam one boundary that he wasn’t to cross. Adam had full authority but he wasn’t to eat from one tree in the garden. Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT) says, *“But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden - except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”*

Other than that, He allows Adam to have full reign of the entire garden. God then gives Adam the opportunity to name each of the animals that He had created. The Bible says that after Adam named all of the animals, *“no suitable helper was found for Adam”*. In other words, nothing else up to that point looked anything close to what Adam looked like. So the Scripture says that God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping, *“He took one of Adam’s rib…then the Lord God made woman from the rib…”*

Now listen, if this isn’t the bottom of a ladder that Adam is getting ready to climb up, then I don’t know what is. God gives Adam an entire kingdom to call his own. He gives him full authority to name animals whatever he wants to name them, I mean we have Adam to blame for the difficult spelling of hippopotamus. God gives Adam his very own woman, she’s the only one on the face of the planet and she really digs Adam. My point is that things are looking up for Adam. He’s got Eve, He’s got a sweet pad, He’s got authority.

But something goes wrong, suddenly Adam’s ladder takes a turn and what starts as an upward climb turns into a long slide down.

The Scripture says that Eve was tempted and gave into eating off of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that in turn she gave it to Adam who also ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result the Bible says that God banished Adam and Eve from the garden.

What happened? Why would Adam and Eve allow something that was obviously the beginning of something amazing, something that was the beginning of an upward climb on a pretty awesome ladder slip away and turn into something that created a downward spiral in their lives? How could this have happened?

Let me suggest to you what I believe God speaks to us in this passage and that’s that Adam and Eve, in the words of my parents when I was growing up, “Got a little too big for their britches”.

It’s probably not a stretch for you and I to understand how Adam and Eve were perhaps feeling at this moment in history. Adam has just had some amazing experiences in life right:

* He got to name animals.
* He’s given this amazing place to live in with complete reign of things are to be done. He’s got some serious authority right?
* He’s just landed, not only a woman but the only woman that exist. It wasn’t like Adam saw Eve and was like, “Oh hey, here’s a woman. Yea, I’ll take her.” This woman thing had never been done before. His mind was probably blown when he saw Eve for the first time and then he finds out that he can get with her and God’s cool with it. That’s awesome.

So in the midst of all of these amazing experiences Adam and Eve start to lose sight of who’s really in charge. They start to get a little too puffed up. They perhaps start to feel like maybe there’s more out there that should be theirs and maybe God is holding out on them. They start to think things like, *“If this is awesome, I wonder how awesome that is?”* They start to doubt the boundaries that God had placed in their lives for their protection. They start to think, *“Hey God’s not protecting me, He’s limiting me.”*

Here’s where I think you and I can make the jump to our lives today. Sometimes we do the same thing in that we start to have some success in school or in relationships or in our jobs or in our athletic ability and suddenly we start to doubt the things that God says we should avoid because, “what if?” What if God’s holding back on me? What if there’s something out there that’s really awesome and for whatever reason God doesn’t want me to have that? What if I want it?

In other words we start to get a little too big for our spiritual britches right? We start to think that we know best. We start to think that maybe God isn’t as smart as we always thought He was. We start to wonder if maybe God has lost touch a little from what real life here on earth is and maybe, just maybe we know better.

It’s at those moments in your spiritual journey that a ladder can quickly turn into a chute and you can find yourself tumbling backwards.

Allow me to challenge you that when you find yourself at the bottom of a ladder, when you find yourself on an amazing upward climb in your life, perhaps in the area of:

* School
* Relationships
* Athletics
* Job
* Friends

You may find yourself in a place where people are coming around you and telling you how amazing you are.

* You’re so gifted.
* You’re so great.
* You’re so blessed.
* You’re so successful.
* You’re so smart.
* You’re so wise.

You will never be wiser than the one who is the very source of wisdom.

Proverbs 1:7 (NLT) says, *“Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”*

Proverbs 3:7 (NLT) says, *“Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.”*

There are perhaps lots of other examples of people and situations in Scripture that illustrate this idea of ladders turning into chutes.

The Bible describes Solomon as the wisest man who ever lived. Certainly someone that we would describe as one who is climbing the ladder.

Elijah has this amazing experience against the prophets of a false god. The one true God sends down literal fire from Heaven to consume not only his offering but the offering to the false God as well. After an experience like that Elijah could be described as someone who was at the base of a ladder and perhaps even half way towards some more amazing experiences in his life.

Both of those accounts in Scripture end with Solomon and Elijah tumbling backwards and for our purposes tonight, taking the long slide down a chute.

So my point is that there are lots of examples, but I chose to share this one with you because I believe that all of the other examples are sourced in this idea. You and I are called to trust God more then we trust ourselves. All throughout Scripture, time and time again we see it, God has people on the move to bigger and better things, God has people on the ladder towards greater things for His glory and suddenly they start to doubt His plan. We start to buy into the idea that we know best.