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## **To Dream the Impossible Dream (Or, Safe as Hell)**

Luke 19: 1-26  
Peter Hiett  
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Every year, they come out with this thing called “The Darwin Awards.” The awards are given to those who have most advanced our species by eliminating their own genetic material from the gene pool. The following is the most popular Darwin Award of all time:

*“The Arizona Highway Patrol were mystified when they came upon a pile of smoldering wreckage embedded in the side of a cliff rising above the road at the apex of a curve. The metal debris resembled the site of an airplane crash, but it turned out to be the vaporized remains of an automobile. The make of the vehicle was unidentifiable at the scene.*

*The folks in the lab finally figured out what it was, and pieced together the events that led up to its demise.*

*It seems that a former Air Force sergeant had somehow got hold of a Jet-Assisted Take-Off unit. JATO units are solid-fuel rockets used to give heavy military transport airplanes an extra push for takeoff from short airfields.*

*The sergeant took the JATO unit into the Arizona desert and found a long, straight stretch of road. He attached the JATO unit to his car, jumped in, accelerated to a high speed, and fired off the rocket.*

*The facts, as best as could be determined, are as follows:*

*The operator was driving a 1967 Chevy Impala. He ignited the JATO unit approximately 3.9 miles from the crash site. This was established by the location of a prominently scorched and melted strip of asphalt. The vehicle quickly reached a speed of between 250 and 300 miles per hour and continued at that speed, under full power, for an additional twenty to twenty-five seconds. The soon-to-be pilot experienced G-forces usually reserved for dogfighting F-14 jocks under full afterburners.*

*The Chevy remained on the straight highway for approximately 2.6 miles (fifteen to twenty seconds) before the driver applied the brakes, completely melting them, blowing the tires, and leaving thick rubber marks on the road surface. The vehicle then became airborne for an additional 1.3 miles, impacted the cliff face at a height of 125 feet, and left a blackened crater three feet deep in the rock.*

*Most of the driver's remains were not recovered; however, small fragments of bone, teeth, and hair were extracted from the crater, and fingernail and bone shards were removed from a piece of debris believed to be a portion of the steering wheel.*

*Ironically, a still-legible bumper sticker was found: 'How do you like my driving? Dial 1-800-EAT-####.' "*

Eliminated from the gene pool. "Survival of the Fittest."

You see, "The Fittest" are the *safest*. Safety is the pursuit of survival.

Well, that was the Darwin Award for 1995. And you gotta wonder, what would possess a person to do such a thing?

Well, actually, it's not true.

It was *believed* to be a true story for several years, until it was debunked by the Arizona Highway Patrol.

We think, "Of course, cause no one would be *that stupid*."

Several years ago, I sat in Gary Reddish's brand new Jeep Wrangler. It was late October, the jeep was idling, next to me was my bride, in front of me was "Bird's Eye Bog."

In the bog were the rusted-out remains of several other four-wheel-drive vehicles. On top of the bog was a thin crusty layer of frozen mud. We had borrowed Gary's Jeep and we were on a romantic weekend getaway.

My wife said, "Peter, turn around – there's no way."

My middle-aged mind said, "Peter, turn around – there's no way."

And then, it was like something inside me pictured a rocket strapped to my back.

I cried, "*We can do it!*" I floored it, and we took off like a rocket ...

A couple hours later, covered in mud, my wife covered in mud, Gary's brand-new Jeep sinking and gurgling in mud ... I said, "Honey, unless we start hiking now, I'm worried we'll freeze to death."

Several hours after that, I walked out of the forest onto an old road. My "help-mate" was about twenty paces behind me, muttering something about romantic weekend getaways and The Darwin Awards.

We hitchhiked into Leadville with a guy named Nathan, who had great dreadlocks. The guys at the auto garage looked at us covered in mud, asked where we'd been jeeping. I described the area, and one of them said, "Bird's Eye Bog!" and they all broke into laughter.

We finally found this redneck named Bill (he had Lazy-Boy chairs bolted to the floor of his Chevy Blazer) who tried to get us back up to the Jeep before nightfall, but he blew out two tires in the attempt. So, we had to turn around and spend the night at the Silver King Motel in Leadville, without anything to sleep in. That had kind of been a fantasy of mine, but ironically, it wasn't my wife's idea of a romantic weekend.

We spent most of the night awake and watching the weather channel. It looked like snow, which meant we'd have to wait until spring, and I'd have to buy Gary a new Jeep.

Well, in the morning, Leadville Bill got us back up to the bog. As I jumped out to hook up the cable, my wife later informed me that Bill turned to her and said, "Lady, your husband must've had his head up his \_\_\_!" And my "help-mate" said to Bill: "Yes."

What would possess a person to do such a thing?

Last week, celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in Florida, I took Susan kayaking in an estuary. I thought we should tackle the open sea ... and we swamped the kayak.

What would possess a person?

Well, probably Walt Disney, and any number of Hollywood movies or comic books about super heroes – fellows who don't play it safe, who "dream the impossible dream," who "fight the unbeatable foe," who "bear with unbearable sorrow."

When we were kids, we loved that stuff.

My very first memory is of my friend Cash, who lived next door to us in Junction City, Kansas. He looked at me, and he said, "Watch this!" and rode his tricycle like a rocket down the big cement steps in front of our house.

I remember the day I rode my bike off the bleachers behind our house. I think I, like, pictured a rocket on my back.

We all dreamed of rockets on our backs, like *Iron Man*.

My kids liked to pretend they were heroes: Coleman liked to play Hercules; Jonathan said one day, "Dad, when I grow up, I'm gonna be a race car driver!"

When I was little, with all seriousness, I said to my mom, "When I grow up, I'm going to be the President! I'm gonna save the world."

Well, this world has a way of beating those superhero dreams right out of you, doesn't it? Ask George Bush, or Bill Clinton, or Jimmy Carter.

I rode my bike off the bleachers and nose dived six feet into the dirt. I came home all cut up and bruised.

My friend, Cash, totally crashed his tricycle. I remember, he came back with some kind of medicine all over his skinned-up face.

The sociologist Ernest Becher wrote, "Youth was made for Heroism."

But then comes middle age.

You drive a Jeep into a bog, lose your job, life kicks you in the teeth...

So you start protecting yourself – you *survive*, you become *safe*.

I've been awfully tempted lately, just to be safe.

I heard Tony Campolo tell about an experience he had some time ago, watching the musical *The Man of La Mancha*. A woman sitting next to him began scolding her husband: "John," she kept saying, "John, stop that! You're exposing yourself. You're exposing yourself!" Seated next to her was this middle-aged businessman, dressed in a 3-piece suit, and he was crying ... *sobbing* uncontrollably, as on the stage, Don Quixote was singing:

*To dream the impossible dream  
To fight the unbeatable foe  
To bear with unbearable sorrow  
To run where the brave dare not go*

*To right the unrightable wrong  
To love pure and chaste from afar  
To try when your arms are too weary  
To reach the unreachable star*

*This is my quest, to follow that star  
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far*

*To fight for the right, without question or pause  
To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause*

Campolo said, "I wondered what dream was dying or dead in that middle-aged man, clothed in propriety and wealth, sobbing in the theatre."

At mid-life, you realize you're not the hero you dreamed of as a child. You may have a crisis: divorce your wife, drive fast cars, and attach a rocket to your back...

I mean, you may *play around* with adventure, but not *real* adventure. Adventure sports, like kayaking, jeeping, or auto racing... but not *real* adventure ... not adventure from the heart.

*Real* adventure is unsafe. And you've been hurt one too many times, and now you just have too much to lose.

So instead of dreaming about saving the world, you buy a boat.

You start saying things like, "Life is precious", and "Safety first!"  
You become conservative.

Now listen, I'm what they call "conservative" on a bunch of issues, but I sure hope I'm not conservative at heart. I'm not into conserving this world as it is.

Well, in Scripture, the Pharisees were conservative to the core. The Jewish scholar, Joseph Klausner writes,

"The Judaism of that time had no other aim than to save the tiny nation – the guardian of great ideals – from sinking into the broad sea of heathen culture."

To conserve a few values, to keep our children safe in the midst of this heathen culture... is that what church is about? Safety first?

Is the church a historical conservation society, guarding some dead ideals that need guarding because they're dead?

Or, is it an *army*?

And if it is an army, what kind of motto is, "Safety First"?

"Play it Safe," "Be conservative," "Safety First" ... that's not the motto for an army! It's more like enemy propaganda.

In the *Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, the arch-demon Screwtape gives advice to his nephew on tempting humans. He writes:

*The long, dull, monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather. You see, it is so hard for these creatures to persevere. The routine of adversity, the gradual decay of youthful loves and youthful hopes, the quiet despair (hardly felt as pain) of ever overcoming the chronic temptations with which we have again and again defeated them – the drabness which we create in their lives, and the inarticulate resentment with which we teach them to respond to it – all this provides admirable opportunities of wearing out a soul by attrition.*

*If, on the other hand, the middle years prove prosperous, our position is even stronger. Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is “finding his place in it,” while really it is finding its place in him ... That is why we must often wish long life to our patients; seventy years is not a day too much for the difficult task of unraveling their souls from Heaven and building up a firm attachment to the Earth. While they are young, we find them always shooting off at a tangent.*

*Even if we contrive to keep them ignorant of explicit religion, the incalculable winds of fantasy and music and poetry – the mere face of a girl, the song of a bird, or the sight of a horizon – are always blowing our whole structure away.*

*They will not apply themselves steadily to worldly advancement, prudent connections, and the policy of “safety first”. Real worldliness is a work of time – assisted, of course, by pride, for we teach them to describe the creeping death as Good Sense or Maturity or Experience ... where Virtue is concerned, “Experience is the mother of illusion.”*

*Whatever you do, keep your patient as safe as you possibly can.*

*Your affectionate uncle,*

#### SCREWTAPE

At mid-life, I find myself incredibly tempted to safety.

At mid-life, the church is incredibly tempted to safety and control.

At mid-life, we get Conservative,  
Prudent,  
and Safe.

Now, a few may go off the deep end, and attach a rocket to their car, and fly into a cliff ... And we kind of admire them from afar, but we give them a Darwin Award: first to evolve right out of the gene pool.

Or, some might sell everything and move to Calcutta, trying to save the world. We call them “fanatics,” or say they have a “Messiah Complex.”

Have you ever wondered if Jesus had a “Messiah Complex?”

He sure wasn't into *conserving* the social order.

He definitely didn't play it safe.

He never even made it to middle-age.

Maybe He'd win a Darwin Award.

In Luke 19, we read:

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.*

Zacchaeus was “middle-aged,” “rich,” “safe,” and very alone.

He was a tax collector – a Jew who had sold out to the Roman occupiers. And now he took money from his countrymen to save his own skin.

He was playing it safe – Safe as Hell.

In verse 10, Jesus refers to him as one of the “lost.” The Greek word translated “lost” is *apollolos*, from *apollumi*. It's more commonly translated *destroyed* or *perished*.

When Jesus says, “fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell (*Gehenna*), the word *destroy* is *apollumi*.

Zacchaeus is *apollolos* – lost, perished, destroyed ... Safe as Hell.

Scripture tells us that he was “small of stature.” Perhaps he'd been picked on or excluded as a boy. Perhaps his heart had been wounded one too many times.

Whatever the case, Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

So I think it's clear that Zacchaeus wasn't simply guarding his treasure, he was *guarding his heart*. We all guard our hearts, because the real danger in this world doesn't have to do with our finances, it has to do with our hearts.

Zacchaeus kept his safe – Safe as Hell – so no one could see ...

But *Jesus sees*. He sees Zacchaeus in the tree. He calls him by name, saying, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down ... today I must abide at your house.”

For Jesus, that was very unsafe... negotiating with traitors such as Zacchaeus, in front of the religious authorities.

Over and over again in the gospels, Jesus gets in trouble for sitting *at table* (*Trapeza*) with tax collectors and sinners.

In that culture, to have table fellowship with someone was to commune with them in the sanctuary of your heart.

The great Bible scholar Jaachim Jeremias wrote,

*It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness. In short, sharing a table means sharing life.*

So, Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners, according to Jeremias, were the most meaningful expressions of the message of the redeeming love of God.

Jesus puts his heart on the table at Zacchaeus's house, and in just a week, He'll pay for it. It's not at all safe.

Jesus puts His heart on the table, and then Zacchaeus does as well. For he stands and declares, "I give half of my possessions to the poor," and then "To anyone I've defrauded, I will restore it fourfold."

*Zacchaeus sounds like Jesus.*

Then, in verses 9 & 10, Jesus says, "Today, salvation has come to this house." For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost – the perished, the *apollolos*.

The Son of Man came:

*To fight for the right  
Without question or pause,  
To be willing to march into hell  
For a heavenly cause ...*

And they all murmured.

Verse 11:

*As they heard these things, He proceeded to tell a parable, because He was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the Kingdom of God was to appear immediately.*

*He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'*

*But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'*

*When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business."*

In Matthew's version of the story, the lord, the master gives them 5 talents, 2 talents, and 1 talent. But in Luke's version, the master gives each servant the same thing – 1 pound, or 1 *mina*.

I think Jesus told the story both ways.

For you see, the Master gives each of us different things: talents, gifts of the Spirit ... Yet He also gives each of us the *same thing*:

He gives us His Spirit,  
His heart,  
His love,

“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

And He says, “Invest, give, trade ... do business”

[verse 16]

*The first came before him, saying, “Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.” And he said to him, “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.”*

*And the second came, saying, “Lord, your mina has made five minas.” And he said to him, “And you are to be over five cities.”*

*Then another came, saying, “Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.”*

A “severe man” ... And yet his master had just been very gracious.

This slave doesn’t seem to know or trust his master’s heart.

He said: “You reap where you did not sow” ... he’s calling the master a thief.

But every good thing comes from the Master. So he’s blaming the master, and playing it safe.

[verse 22]

*The master said to him, “I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank?”*

Literally, the Lord says, “Why did you not put my money on the table (the *Trapeza*)?”

It seems that He’s referring to the money changers’ tables at the temple (the investors), and that’s why the word is translated *Bank*.

Yet *Trapeza* is literally *table*, and this parable is referring to what happened at Zacchaeus' house, and to the way Jesus would sit *at table* with tax collectors and sinners.

Remember, Jesus told us how we are to use our money. He said, "Use righteous mammon to win friends for the eternal habitations. Use the Lord's *stuff* (that you think is yours) to prepare banquets for prostitutes, tax collectors, and lost boys ... the *Apollolos*."

Psalm 23: "He has prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies."

He saves the world with a banquet of love! *Use* His banquet of love – lay it on the table.

*"Why then did you not put my money on the table, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?"*

*And he said to those who stood by, "Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas."*

*And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten minas!" [And the lord said], "I tell you that to everyone who has more, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me."*

"Slaughter them before me"... Now this is something of a side note... but a synonym for that word, *slaughter*, is *destroy* (*Apollumi*).

These men now become the *apollolos*, the lost, as Jesus refers to them in the next chapter.

Now this is just something to think about, but do you think Jesus ever *stops* "seeking and saving the lost?"

Do you think He ever *stops* being the Savior?

And do you think the gates of Hades (Hell) can prevail against Him?

Perhaps, for all time, He seeks and saves the *Apollolos*, and whatever the case,

I BET THAT'S NOT SAFE!!!

Actually, Jesus is called, "The Lamb, slaughtered for the sins of the world." That doesn't sound safe.

You know, when you reflect on this parable, and the concept of safety, it's rather shocking how we use this parable to mean just the *opposite* of what it says.

We talk like, "the good steward" is the conservative, cautious, and safe one ... and yet it's the safe steward that the master calls *wicked*!

- It's the risky steward who risks everything, who is faithful.
- It's the steward that throws parties for his master's debtors (in Luke 16).
- It's the woman who dumps \$30,000 worth of perfumed oil on Jesus' feet.
- It's the widow who puts her only penny in the temple treasury.
- It's the kid who gives all he has – 5 loaves and 2 fish, who sees a *huge* return.
- It's Zacchaeus saying, "I give half of all I've got, and I restore fourfold."
- \*It's the disciple who picks up his cross.

These are the good stewards. Is that safe?

Well, maybe so.

Did you notice that all the extravagant and risky stewards in Jesus' story all got great returns?

I used to think Jesus messed up the story, 'cause it misses the guy who invested everything and got no return, and instead, just got crucified.

But it seems Jesus is saying, "There are no stewards who invest and get no return... even in this age, as well as the age to come." (18:30)

Think of Zacchaeus. Before, he'd been "Safe as Hell," because his heart had really been Hell: dark, isolated, self-centered, and alone.

Yet, after Jesus went there, after giving so much away, I bet the condition of his heart and his home changed dramatically. He must have been *rich* with love.

And maybe that's our problem. We don't understand God's currency. For God, houses, cars, diamonds and gold hold very little value. But love ... love is *everything*. God is Love. Faith, hope, and love abide.

And "To him who has will more be given." And "To him who has not (faith, hope, and love), even what he has (houses, cars, and gold) will be taken away." It's worthless.

So maybe the risky stewards really are most safe, and the safe stewards really are most at risk.

You know, we (The Sanctuary) used that tagline; "A Safe Place to be a Mess." I love that, because I think it means, "A Safe Place to be Unsafe."

Maybe you have to lose your life to save it. You have to be unsafe in order to be safe. If you try to save your life, you'll lose it. If you seek safety, you are most unsafe. That's the profound danger of safety.

You see, if this world really is an upside-down, fallen and cursed world, then safe at home *in it* is the most dangerous place to be. And the safest of all places to be is *hanging on a cross with Jesus*.

In Matthew's version of the story, the master says, "Enter the joy of the master." Maybe that's how we enter the joy of the Master – by being crucified with Jesus.

It's not by "playing it safe", but "giving it all away in love."

And now I hope you realize I'm not just talking to you about money. I'm not preaching a financial stewardship message to you. I think I'm preaching Kingdom stewardship to my own heart.

I'm talking about the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts. I think that's the *mina*. To receive it is so sweet. And yet to invest it can be brutally painful and feel entirely unsafe.

For 15 years, I felt like I gave my heart –invested it – and last year it at least felt, at least to me, like I got crucified.

People will say, "What did you do wrong?" Well, I'm sure I did a bunch of things wrong, and there are several things that I'd do differently.

But when people say, "What went wrong? You invested ... and what went wrong?"

Well, I'm not so sure that it went wrong. I think that maybe in the deepest way ... it went right.

Look at the next verse in Luke (verse 28):

*And when He (Jesus) had said these things, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.*

Why was He going up to Jerusalem?

To be slain.

Why was he going up to Jerusalem?

Because the Master is preparing a feast.

The Master was fixing to lay it all on the *Trapeza* –the table – *that week*.

Jesus is the Lamb, slain for the sins of the world. Slain by those who did not want him to reign over them.

He is “the feast prepared by God in the presence of His enemies.”

God didn't just give His *stuff*, He gave His *heart*... Jesus, from the bosom of the Father.

His heart scorned, reviled, denied, and betrayed by those He loved.

And now you may be thinking, “Good Lord, you want me to love like Jesus? I'll sign a commitment card, maybe even tithe, but love like Jesus? Lay everything on the table? I don't think I have the strength.”

Well, you *don't* have the strength.  
But you *do* have the desire, don't you?

*To dream the impossible dream  
To fight the unbeatable foe  
To bear with unbearable sorrow  
To run where the brave dare not go*

You have that desire, you have that longing. For God has been nurturing that longing –that hunger – within you. Why? Because He's preparing to strap a rocket to your back! Even better, He's preparing to have you ingest it.

For at the right time, on the night He was betrayed ... *at table*. The Servant took bread, and He broke it – He slaughtered it – saying, “This is My body, which is for you.” And in the same manner, after supper, He took the cup, and He said, “This is the New Covenant in My blood.”

And He laid it on the table... The *Trapeza*.

He *is* the impossible dream. He said with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

*He fought the unbeatable foe.*

*He bore the unbearable sorrow*

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

*He ran where the brave dare not go.*

*He made right the unrightable wrong.*

*He descended into Hell for a Heavenly cause.*

*And the world will be better for this: that one Man, scorned and covered with scars ...*

BUT He didn't stop there. He said, "You! Eat it! Drink it! Ingest it!"

You see, your dreams – even your superhero dreams – have not been too big. They have been far too small. You don't belong in the mud, you were made to fly.

And listen, I don't think it's a Messiah complex if, in fact, the Messiah dwells within you. If, in fact, you have become His Body... even "scorned and covered with scars."

I don't think it's a Messiah complex if you know that without Him you can do nothing. That's not arrogant. That's not a Messiah complex, it's a Messiah communion – a feast with Jesus, Messiah, as He saves the world by rising from the dead.

When Jonathan said, "Dad, when I grow up, I'm gonna be a race car driver!" I said this to him: "Can I come with you?" He said, "Dad, you *have* to come with me! You know I can't drive. *You* have to drive."

When I told my mom, "When I grow up, I'm going to be the President," she said, "Can I come with you?" I said, "Mom, you *have* to come with me. You know I don't know how to write."

Jesus tells us, "Go and make disciples of all nations," and we say, "Jesus, You know we can't make disciples of all nations." And He says, "Lo, I AM with you always."

So why am I preaching this?

Cause I've been hurt, and now I'm afraid to invest my *Mina* ... afraid to give my heart.

Maybe you've been hurt. Here, someplace else ... and now you're afraid to give *your* heart.

Well, if Love is our currency, in this world, investing will hurt. And yet even in this world, that investment *cannot fail*. For Love does not fail, and the Word does not return void.

So I'm saying, "Let's go for it! Let's give our hearts!"

Would you give your heart to people in this room?

Would you give your heart to your House church?

Would you give your heart to the people outside?

Would you invite people to come inside, and give them your heart?

You can only do that if you receive God's heart, His *Mina*, His pound of flesh ... Body broken and Blood shed.

So come to the table: Because I think God really wants to strap a rocket to your back.

Then, let's shoot for a star, follow the star ... The Bright and Morning Star.

Hey, I have an even better idea: Let's shoot for a Darwin Award.

'Cause you see, I have this theory that Heaven is absolutely packed with people proudly displaying Darwin Awards... people like Stephen, the first martyr; and Peter, crucified upside down; or Paul, beheaded or boiled in oil or whatever... proudly displaying their Darwin Award:

First to evolve out of this fallen world!

First fruits of a New Creation!

What could possibly possess a person to do such a thing?

This.

"On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it, saying, "Take and eat, this is my body." And in the same manner, after supper, and having given thanks, He said, "This is my blood, of the covenant, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Take and drink."

So, we invite you to come forward, tear off a piece of bread and dip it in the cup. The cups with the ribbon are wine, and the cups without the ribbon are juice. They are *both* Rocket Fuel.