



By Faith, Not By Sight

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2nd Corinthians 5:1-10

It is difficult for us to face the future. We stare into an unknown, uncertain as to the direction to take. When Columbus started off on a navigation to take him across the world to India, he did not know he would end up on islands off two continents he knew nothing about. He had some information on which he set sail. He knew the earth was a globe, he just thought it was a third smaller than it is. Had the islands of the Caribbean and the American continents not existed, he would likely have run out of food and water before reaching his destination. He had some information to go on, but it was not really enough. He took a chance and it served him well, even if things did not turn out as he expected.

Not all risks taken succeed. For every story like that of Columbus, hundreds more don't turn out so well. We heard this week of a boatload of refugees leaving Turkey for Europe who drowned when their boat capsized. They were leaving one disastrous situation in Syria in hopes of a better life, only to find their lives cut short. They stepped out into a risky venture, paying smugglers to get them out of a desperate situation, knowing full well of its uncertainty. They sought relief from known disaster, heading into uncertainty that spoke of risk along with possibility and hope. Their situation was not unlike that of so many taking the risks to enter this country to escape severe economic conditions and drug violence in countries to the south. They took a risk along with many others, not knowing the future, but believing the risk was worthwhile.

We celebrate the adventures of Columbus. We grieve over the misplaced hopes of the boatload of refugees. At heart, they are not very different from each other. One succeeding in a risky venture, the others did not. The motivations that drove them were very similar. They looked at the information before them and made choices, risky choices, based on a desire to advance their economic interests, to build a more secure life for themselves. That's about as far as their vision could take them.

Jim Elliot had a grasp on the transience and uncertainty of life. He knew he was on earth for a short time and chose to make the life he was given count for something more. During his college career, Jim determined to place his life into service for Christ Jesus, regardless of what cost might lie ahead. Elliot famously declared, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."¹ His proposal of life was different from that of Columbus and the boatload of refugees. They were hoping for something better, something different from what they knew. They were seeking solutions to varying problems and circumstances. They were hoping to build a better life. They were not sure of the outcome. They were hoping, but unsure what awaited them. They were taking a risk that might pay off grandly or might claim their lives. Jim was pursuing faithfulness and was assured of the ultimate result.

Elliot was not seeking to build life on the basis of his own vision of the future. He was not seeking to build his own life, at all. Unlike Columbus, he was not seeking to chart a new course for a lucrative trade venture with India. Unlike the boatload of refugees, he was not seeking a better life for any personal gain. He was focused rather on other issues altogether. He was focused of handing his life and dreams, his actions and purposes, over to God to accomplish God's dreams and purposes.

His life played out along the lines of what Paul describes in 2nd Corinthians 5. Jim knew that life on earth points to a greater reality. He understood that we are all simply passing through this life, that a greater reality awaits us in the life beyond. The things of this world are not permanent, nor are they

¹ Elliott, Elisabeth. *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*. New York: Harper, 1958.

worth the focus or importance we tend to grant them. There is something more out there. There is a purpose beyond our material benefit which can drive our lives forward into a greater sense of purpose and reward. It is what we call a life of faith.

We might say that Columbus was a man of vision. He had an understanding of the world that ran counter to the established norms. He saw possibility and took a risk to march forward into that vision. We laud and praise his courage in following after that vision. We raise men as he up more than anything, however, because they actually succeeded in their dreams and visions. For every Columbus, however, there is a boatload of refugees whose lives are cut short in their quests after another vision of the future, a dream of possibilities and hopes. We might well call them all visionaries, as they all make the same kind of calls based on what they know, see, and hope. Yet the Columbuses and refugees of this world all walk by sight and we are called to something more.

We are called to guide our lives not by our dreams of the future, not in striving after the next best thing that might propel us into the limelight of wealth, power, and self-actualization. We are not called to live according to our best vision and understanding of the things of this life, but according to God's purposes of transformation.

Jim Elliot knew that embarking on a missionary career in the Amazon was a death knell for him. He wrote consistently of an understanding that death awaited him, even as Paul saw chains for himself in Jerusalem and as Jesus looked ahead to a cross. In that vision of the future, however, he saw results and accomplishment that would make it all worthwhile. He saw the transformation of his own life into an extension of the life, presence, and ministry of Jesus Christ. He saw the indwelling of God's Spirit, not as a means to realize his own objectives, but as the means to fulfill the purposes of God's call upon his life and transformation in the lives of others through him.

As Paul, Jim was not focused on things of this world. He did not care to plan for a secure and long life. He did not care to work toward wealth and safety and a large family as sufficient purposes, as enough of a vision to account for his actions and plans. They were both concerned and consumed with the idea of presenting the entirety of their lives into the service of God's purposes and dreams.

Walking and living by faith was for them not a question of having a clearer vision of the future according to the same criteria used by the world around them. Whether we state it or not, that is so often what we really want from God, isn't it? Deep down, we want God to open our vision of the future so that we might become the next legendary figure applauded for success in stumbling into the next great achievement. We want God to show us how to be the Columbus figure of our generation, rather than being one more refugee story that never really made it into a land of new opportunity. We act as though living by faith is simply living according to better sight, when that is not it at all. Living by faith is living by different parameters altogether.

It is coming to the point of joining Paul and Elliot in allowing God to radically transform our lives and purposes in completely new ways. It is taking the mundane dreams and purposes of humanity and exchanging them for the purposes of God. Such an exchange requires a radical transformation of the very purposes of our lives. It would require that our greatest desires, plans, and dreams be the joining of our lives to the very life of God.

A life lived according to faith does not depend on knowing how the future will turn out. It already knows how the story will end. Paul, Jim, and Jesus all knew that death awaited them. That did not change the direction of their story. It spurred them on to make the best investment they could make on behalf of God's purposes. Jim Elliot died during his second contact with the Aucas in the Amazon. His legacy is a life well-lived and directed and fulfilled. In the next generation, the people who killed him and for whom he died accepted the gospel of Christ. Where will our vision take us? Is it worth it?

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