

Defining Moments

Hebrews 11:7-10, 17-18, 24-27

December 23, 1972....Three Rivers Stadium, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Anybody who remembers the Pittsburgh Steelers football dynasty of the 1970's might say that this is the game that launched the dynasty. It led to four Super Bowl victories in six years (1975, 1976, 1979, 1980). The entire region still talks about what some consider the greatest play in NFL history. The "Immaculate Reception" was a combination of skill, luck and yes....desperation. It was a divisional playoff game against the despised Oakland Raiders, a rivalry that would only intensify in years to come. The low scoring game was nearly over with Oakland hanging onto a slim 7-6 lead. All they had to do was hold off the Steelers for the final few seconds. It was a long way to the end zone, but Pittsburgh had to give it a shot for a chance to score. The play was called and the ball was snapped to Terry Bradshaw, a strong and athletic quarterback possessing a cannon of an arm. He dropped back to pass, only to see the pocket collapsing around him. A defender grabbed him, but he slipped away and moved to his right. Just as another would-be tackler was about to nail him, Bradshaw heaved the ball downfield. The crowd held its collective breath since this was their last chance with only seconds left on the clock. Then came the immortal words from the announcer, "There's a collision on the field." John "Frenchy" Fuqua was the intended receiver, but he and a defender and the football all met at the same time. The two of them splashed onto the turf and the ball ricocheted back up field several yards. The next words from the announcer were even more immortal, "It's caught out of the air!!" Franco Harris, a rookie was not even in the pass pattern, but headed down field in case he was needed. He caught the ball, raced down the sideline and just squeaked into the end zone past a couple of defenders. Needless to say the entire stadium erupted in a manner never before experienced. Not only was it a dramatic finish to the game, it was the first playoff win in forty years of the Steelers' existence. That crowd was venting four decades of pent up frustration.

Sometimes desperation is required to take you to where you need to be. Actually, desperation is often exactly where God wants us. Only then will we move in the direction he has for us.

What is a defining moment? Everything that happens afterward is different from everything that happens beforehand. Not all things are totally different in themselves, but the context and the lens through which things are viewed is different. A defining moment redefines your world and maybe even redefines you. September 11, 2001 was just such a defining moment for our nation in our recent history.

Hebrews 11 is that Bible Hall of Fame chapter where many of the heroes of the faith are noted. Noah built an ark to save his family (vs. 7) without seeing that for which he was being warned. Abraham went to a land he did not know (vs. 8) and offered his son as a sacrifice (vs. 17-18).

Moses chose to identify with his people rather than enjoy the privileges as a prince of Egypt (vs. 24-27). It was as if God said to each of them, “Major changes are coming. Are you with me?”

Of course the ultimate defining moment was what we just celebrated here two weeks ago. The cross and the resurrection of Jesus is the central event in all of eternal history. Everything after that weekend has been different from everything that took place prior to it. I am thankful that Jesus embraced His defining moment.

What if God brought a defining moment into your life....or maybe even a potential defining moment? Some come to us whether we're ready or not, such as illness, injury, loss of a loved one, job change, etc. Other ones might involve God wanting to make an adjustment in our lives, but He doesn't force it. In other words, if God wanted to make a significant change in your life, would He have your permission? If God had a defining moment in mind for you, would you embrace it or resist it?

In Numbers 13-14 God sent the twelve spies into Canaan to explore it and develop an assessment of its people, resources and more. The spies came back and reported how amazing the place was and even brought back a cluster of grapes that had to be carried by two of them on a pole. However ten of the twelve were intimidated by the people there and that majority report made the entire nation melt in fear. Only Joshua and Caleb said that they could take the land since God had promised it. Their defining moment was squandered as the people grumbled about the dangers ahead. They said no to God and as a result God said no to them. They wandered in the desert for forty years until that entire generation had died off. Only Joshua and Caleb entered the land of milk and honey that God had promised to them.

Would our church give God permission to make changes? I believe that for many churches the answer is no. Those churches are now bars, restaurants, apartments, museums and dance halls.

God wants us to say yes. Here's an even bigger challenge. Will you say yes before you're given an assignment? Can you trust God that much or do you need lots of information to make a good decision? Noah, Abraham and Moses had precious little more than God's call on their lives and they said yes.

Truthfully, God will not likely speak if you are not ready to obey Him. It's actually an act of mercy on God's part not to move if we would disobey. If you say no long enough, you will be forced to step aside and He will find that yes somewhere. His agenda will be carried out. I don't want to be on the sideline when I should be in the game. I also don't want to be driven back into the wilderness when I could have said yes. Is there a land of promise to which God wants to guide each of us? Is there a land of promise to which God wants to guide our church?

Will we say yes?