

Failure into Success

A DEVASTATED STEVE SMITH has broken down as he admitted the Cape Town ball-tampering scandal was a failure of his leadership.

Smith arrived back in Sydney today after being banned for 12 months and stripped of the Australian captaincy for at least two years.

"I want to, as captain of the Australian cricket team, I take full responsibility," he said. "I made a serious error in judgement.

"It was a failure of leadership, my leadership.

"I will do everything I can to make up for my mistake and the damage it's caused.

"If any good is to come from this it can be a lesson for others and I hope I can be a force for change.

"I know I'll regret this for the rest of my life. I'm absolutely gutted."

The whole world has been shocked by the ball tampering affair by Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft. But many were not surprised because of the perceived culture of sledging and pushing hard to win at all costs.

Failure is a horrible thing to experience. It is harder because of their own folly. There have been some huge mistakes and failures in history that have had some sad consequences. ONE SUCH

FAILURE WAS OPERATION COTTAGE.

Operation Cottage was a tactical manoeuvre which completed the Aleutian Islands campaign. On August 15, 1943, Allied military forces landed on Kiska Island, which had been occupied by Japanese forces since June, 1942. The Japanese, however, had secretly abandoned the island two weeks prior, and so the Allied landings were unopposed. Despite this, after over two days in thick fog and in a confused state of affairs, U.S. and Canadian forces mistook each other for the enemy. The brief firefight left 32 dead, with a further 50 wounded on either side and 130 trench foot wounds. 191 troops went missing during the two-day stay on the island and presumably also died from friendly fire, booby traps, or environmental causes.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR worst failure that led to embarrassment or worse, shame?

MARK WROTE his gospel sometime during or soon after the Roman Jewish war in 66-74 CE. Roman oppression led to numerous Jewish uprisings, involving great bloodshed. Finally, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and burned the temple in 70 CE. This destruction traumatized Christians and Jews alike. Against this background, Mark writes his gospel. One of the reasons for the composition was to reassure and instruct his readers in their faith. His main vehicle of instruction is the disciples. Mark presents the disciples in a harsher manner than the other three gospels. However, Mark's severe depiction of the disciples serves a powerful purpose: to teach the readers about true discipleship.

FIRST, MARK PRESENTS the disciples in a positive light to encourage identification. In 1:16-20, the disciples respond to Jesus' call to follow him. Because the readers are also followers of Christ, they immediately identify with the disciples. Subsequent scenes reinforce this positive image. Jesus' appointment of the twelve in 3:13-19 shows they were specially selected for their roles.

The next section, 3:20-35, suggests that the disciples are Jesus' true family. In 4:11, Jesus says he will give them the mystery of the kingdom of God. Then, in 6:7-13, the disciples are sent out on a mission where they experience success in preaching, healing and casting out demons.

After creating a strong identification between the readers and the disciples, Mark presents the

failures of the disciples.

Mark arranges their failures around three boat scenes, three passion predictions, and the arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

THE FIRST BOAT SCENE is in 4:35-41.

After witnessing healings and receiving private instruction, the disciples still become afraid when Jesus calms the storm. They ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (4:41). For the first time, the readers question whether the disciples will understand Jesus and his purpose.

THE SECOND BOAT SCENE in 6:45-52 follows the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus walks on water and calms the sea, and the disciples' response of amazement falls short of true understanding. The feeding of the five thousand gave the disciples a glimpse of Jesus' divine sonship, and Jesus' use of "It is I" (6:50) also alludes to divinity. Yet, the disciples failed to see these signs. Mark says the disciples' hearts were hardened, a condition previously used to describe the Pharisees in 3:5.

THE THIRD BOAT SCENE in 8:14-21 functions as the climax of the two preceding boat scenes.

After taking part in two feeding miracles, the disciples worry about not having enough bread, and Jesus warns them about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Verse 18 references 4:11-12, comparing the disciples to outsiders, who have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. This scene intimates that the disciples have already fallen prey to the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod: blindness.

THE THREE BOAT SCENES cause the readers, drawn to the disciples, to evaluate

themselves in light of the disciples' failures.

The boat scenes show the disciples' fear, lack of trust, and concern for themselves. Above all else, they show the disciples' lack of understanding as to who Jesus is. Because of Mark's introduction of Jesus in 1:1, the readers know exactly who Jesus is, but these scenes lead them to reconsider their view, evaluating whether they acknowledge Jesus' complete divinity and authority.

The disciples' next failures are arranged around three passion predictions.

THE FIRST PREDICTION in 8:31 follows Peter's confession of Christ in 8:29.

At first, the reader may assume that the disciples finally understand who Jesus is. However, Peter's rebuke of Jesus after Jesus' prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection shows this assumption to be false. Peter's confession is only partially correct because he does not understand Jesus' true mission. Jesus then issues a call to discipleship, emphasizing that to follow him means to take up the cross, a way of persecution and suffering.

THE SECOND PASSION prediction in 9:31 says the disciples do not understand but are afraid to ask.

This lack of understanding becomes apparent in 9:33-34 which relates the disciple's conversations about which of them is the greatest. Even after two passion predictions and Jesus' call to true discipleship, they still hold onto the view that the messiah will bring a kingdom of power and glory. Jesus again attempts to clear the disciples' vision in 9:35-37. He tells them that power and glory come only when one assumes the role of a servant.

A SIMILAR INCIDENT follows the third passion prediction in 10:33-34.

Jesus again predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection, and immediately afterwards, James

and John ask to sit at his right and left hand in glory. This request shows the disciples' blindness most sharply. James and John are not asking for positions of glory as they suppose but positions of death and suffering beside Jesus on the cross. Jesus follows this request with a symbolic reference to his death and a reminder that to be great, one must follow his example and be a servant.

THE READERS ARE AGAIN compelled to embark on self-evaluation during these three passion predictions. The failures involve a rejection of suffering and a desire for personal power and glory. Jesus' teachings after each passion prediction reveal the true way of discipleship: a way of servanthood, suffering, and death. The readers examine their own lives to see if they are following the way of the cross.

Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion present the last set of failures by the disciples.

IN 14:10-11, Judas Iscariot makes a deal with the chief priests, and in 14:43-45, he betrays Jesus with a kiss.

Mark says three times (14:10, 20, 43) that Judas is one of the Twelve, highlighting his intimate relationship with Christ and emphasizing the treachery of his betrayal.

NEXT, GETHSEMANE shows the final failure of the disciples to accept the way of suffering.

While praying at Gethsemane, Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to keep watch and pray. However, as Jesus accepts his impending death, the three disciples sleep. Then, at the crucial hour of Jesus arrest, the disciples flee in terror. When seen in light of 14:31, where they communally pledged to die with Jesus, their desertion is even more devastating.

THEN THERE IS Peter's denial of Jesus, 14:66-72.

As Jesus confesses before the high priest, Peter rejects Jesus before a servant girl and anonymous bystanders. Jesus' confession brings death, while Peter's rejection is an effort to save his life.

FINALLY, THE GOSPEL ends with the failure of the women to tell anyone about the resurrection of Jesus.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

THE READERS ARE AGAIN compelled to embark on self-evaluation. Will you desert Jesus when you are challenged to confess your faith and belief in Him? Will you betray Jesus and sell your soul for a few pieces of silver? Will your words be hollow or will your actions testify to whom you have put your trust in? Will you keep your mouth shut when you are given an opportunity to tell the world that Jesus is alive and will make a difference in your life?

IN HIS GOSPEL, through the lives of Jesus’ disciples, Mark asks some serious questions about discipleship of those who come after and say that they are followers of the Christ.

Mark puts a blowtorch at our practice of discipleship! Will we stand tall when the pressure is on? Or will we fall away because it has become “too hot in the kitchen”!

DESPITE THE DISCIPLES’ abject failure, Jesus met them in Galilee as the resurrected one

and resurrected their lives as disciples. We know that they had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. But the resurrected Lord resurrected their failure and turned it into success. We sit here because of their success.

FOR MARK THERE is no issue that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. He knows it and he has experienced it.

The issue is how this fact of history can affect our belief and our failure to be a Jesus disciple.

HE DOES NOT HAVE to go too far. For he too failed in his discipleship. He was invited to go with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. The going got too tough for him. While we can surmise, the end product was that he returned home to Jerusalem. He let Paul and Barnabas down. He was the reason for a big tiff between Paul and Barnabas that broke the partnership.

He knew what failure looked like? He had let the team down and two great missionary friends parted their ways.

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED. Barnabas took him to Cyprus and gave him a second chance to redeem him. His discipleship failure can be resurrected. There was a second chance because of the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrected life ended up writing a gospel about what he experienced: Jesus, the son of God, the Resurrected One, the One who turns failure into success.

ON THIS RESURRECTION SUNDAY, we are reminded that not only Jesus is alive but more importantly but that His resurrection releases the power of God to turn failure into success.

AS WE BRING OUR failures and mistakes to Jesus, the Cross and the shed blood of Jesus offers us grace for all our mistakes and failures that have affected our lives, the ones closest to us and that has sabotaged our destiny. The cross frees us from our shame and guilt. We receive the forgiveness of Christ and in so doing offer ourselves the forgiveness that He offers us.

The resurrection of Jesus testifies that our failures can be resurrected by the power of God. The risen Jesus offers us a resurrected way forward to overcome the failures and their consequences; the feelings of shame and guilt that we feel.

CONCERNED ABOUT THE disintegration of the home and the increased divorce rate, James Dobson, at the time a little-known psychologist of a southern California university hospital, wrote a book in the early '70s in support of corporal punishment: *Dare to Discipline*.

The popularity of the controversial volume caught the eye of TV talk show guru Phil Donahue. He invited Dobson to appear on his Chicago-based show in 1978.

Donahue made the Ph.D. in child development look like a child. Dobson readily admits his performance on Donahue's show was his worst ever. He left the set feeling like a failure.

But Dobson's despair was short-lived. The next day he sought out a 65-year-old advertising agent in a Chicago suburb to discuss the possibility of a national radio program. Doug Mains invited Dobson to his one-man studio in Wheaton, where Dr. James Dobson proceeded to record the pilot broadcast of "Focus on the Family."

What has developed from a disastrous television appearance is nothing short of mind-boggling. "Focus on the Family" is heard on more than 6,000 stations around the world. The 10 magazines Focus publishes reach 2.3 million families each month.

JESUS THROUGH HIS resurrection power can turn your failure into a success. Amen.