

Wow, the unfolding of a few weeks in and around May 2019 was amazing! For a couple of weeks, news outlets worldwide were showing videos of climbers rendered fully immobile right at the top of Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world at 29,029 feet or 8,848 meters. Why were these climbers immobile? But...we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Sir Edmund Hillary is credited with the first documented summiting of Mt. Everest in 1953, at least by a Westerner, although that actually may have happened years earlier, in 1924, by George Mallory and Andrew Irvine. But those two climbers never returned alive and Mallory's body was discovered in 1999, some 75 years later. That reminds me of the old saying, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" So, does Mallory make the record books as the first if Mallory summited Everest but he didn't send a selfie to someone? Of course, the year 1924 didn't have cell phone selfies!

Mountaineering at this level is very expensive and, for many years, only elite mountaineers were training and spending the substantial resources—say, maybe \$50,000—that it took to summit Mt. Everest. Enter "bucket-list tourism" for those who put climbing the world's highest mountain on their list. Adventure seekers like that can be susceptible to unscrupulous guides whose standards and inexperience risk lives.

Add the lack of any real policing of the qualifications of climbers and too-high volume of climbers, and that can foster real trouble. It had happened before in previous years, but the 2019 traffic jams were documented pretty much close to real-time worldwide by photos sent of climbers squeezed together like sardines as they were perched on top of the world, waiting for their turn at the very top.

At least 11 people died. Why? Apparently, a potent combination of many things. A traffic jam that was fostered by a narrow window of acceptable weather. The inexperience of some of the climbers during that window. High-altitude disorientation. 22 degrees below 0 conditions. All that culminating in the bottled oxygen running too low for climbers waiting too long for a turn at the top. Still, some of the famous native Sherpa and Western guides apparently saved the lives of several that were in over their heads.

Interviewed by the *New York Times* and excerpted here, experienced Lebanese mountaineer Fatima Deryan boiled it down to some essentials. "A lot of people were panicking, worrying about themselves—and nobody thinks about those who are collapsing. It is a question of ethics. We are all on oxygen. You figure out that if you help, you are going to die.' [Deryan] offered to help some of the sick people, she said, but then calculated she was beginning to endanger herself and kept going to the summit, which is currently measured at 29,029 feet. On the way back down, she had to fight her way again through the crowds. 'It was terrible,' she said."

Of course, the ethics she references are ethics often directly tied to risk or perceived risk. But the definition of risk is most always in the eyes of the beholder, isn't it?

So, just what makes some people feel compelled to climb to the summit of Mt. Everest? It isn't just to simply get a view of scenery below from 29,000 feet...a modern traveler can get a view at 35,000 feet just by taking a routine commercial flight. So, Everest? Simply the self-satisfaction of getting to the very top? To be one of only a few people in history who get there? To take risks and get rewarded for taking the risks? Surely each and every person has very personal reasons for the taking the risk of summiting Everest.

But Jesus! Jesus' death and resurrection foundationally changed each believer's risk, both now in everyday life and eternally. Risk in the life and the eyes of the beholding-Jesus believer, that's risk radically changed!

The Apostle Paul was what many of us would likely call a risk-taker—always pushing the envelope. BC—before he came to Christ—he took a leading role in persecuting Christians. After getting knocked off his

horse, Paul believed in Jesus....and he took risks. Classic risks—like death, stonings, beatings, prison, shipwrecks, persecution by authorities. Paul was hardly staying in a safe house, writing theological tracts.

That's because Jesus, with His death on the Cross and His resurrection, completely redefined risk for Paul. For born-again believers like Paul, eternal life is assured, and that starts the first moment of belief. In an amazing passage, John 17:3 quotes Jesus praying to His Father and then humbly referencing Himself, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (ESV)

Once we believers know God and understand this, it immeasurably, incredibly changes our risk. So just what is our risk as believers already enjoying eternal life? Our risk is *not doing* something obediently meaningful for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! Paul's writing at 1 Corinthians 3:9-14 is very helpful. There, Paul teaches the Corinthians that salvation is already theirs: so, Paul explains, their risk is *not* doing something on the foundation of Christ, *not* doing that something that will specifically be rewarded over and above the believer's salvation by grace alone...and all other works will burn up at the Judgment Seat.

This is astounding! Eternal life already by grace and faith alone, and rewards for individual believers' risks taken for Christ, risks that are really no risk at all. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Does that sound like risk? No, the risks that really, truly matter—already handled by Christ.

So Paul took his own mountaineering adventure during his second missionary journey—he went to Mars Hill, also called the Areopagus. Mars Hill had a rich, multiple-century history as a place of importance in Greece. In Paul's time, it was where philosophy, law, and religion were hotly debated. And Paul proceeded to give a classic witness of the Gospel, a Christian witness tailored to the listeners at Mars Hill.

Paul did this in obedience to the Lord in his role as an Apostle. This was *not* risky from a Kingdom of God viewpoint—rather, it was risky if Paul did *not* witness and thereby miss his reward for going forth and making disciples! Paul did not pursue a discussion at Mars Hill for the reason of conquering a mountain like Everest for the glory of man, but instead to be more than a conqueror through Christ at Mars Hill, all for the glory of God. For Paul, it's certainly wasn't about conquering a mountain or having dominion or exaltation over others, it was about being an ambassador for Christ and the Gospel.

And so it goes for you and me as well! The real risks of life, the paramount risks—the today risk, the tomorrow risk, and the eternal risk—are all taken care of...by Jesus! And we are further instructed to cast our cares on Him! So what's left are opportunities...privileges...to be obedient, to go forth and make disciples, to love with agape love, with rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ in store for such obedience!

So you and I don't have to remotely pursue trying to summit Mt. Everest, risking life and limb. We don't even have to go to the actual Mars Hill in Greece. But our privilege, like the privilege of the Apostle Paul, is that we are appointed to our own individual Mars Hills, where we go to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, to our families, to our workplace enterprises, to our neighborhoods, to our communities.

You, my friend, can hear another, deeper take about this unique, amazing redefined risk of the Kingdom of God in Key #19 of the Lasting Greatness seminar found at TheWhitestoneForum.org.

We live in an era when, by the common grace of God and free markets and hard work, many people around the world are well-fed, well-clothed, and quite prosperous. So some such people, clearly bored and relieved of the risk of starvation and harsh natural elements, take risks like sky-diving and mountaineering. And some Christians talk themselves into the idea that proclaiming the Gospel is "risky," when in fact Jesus already totally relieved us of risk at the Cross and wants us to proclaim that to others!

What do you say? Eager to go to your Mars Hills appointments, working on your ripening opportunities for effective witness? After all, that's really why you are in your workplace enterprise! What a privilege!

