

During World War II, Japan captured tens of thousands of Allied troops and retained them as prisoners of war. One was Louie Zampirini, the 1936 Olympic runner.

The author, Laura Hillenbrand, wrote about Louie in her current book, Unbroken. After the Olympics, Louie became a B-24 bomber and his plane, the Green Hornet, crashed into the Pacific. He and the pilot, Phil, survived the crash, but were stranded on a life raft forty days, until captured by the Japanese.

The Japanese sent Louie to a POW camp where he was recognized and mistreated by a particularly nasty guard - nicknamed *The Bird*. The Bird beat Louie repeatedly, to within inches of his life. He beat Louie with his fists, crashed his skull with a baton, struck Louie across the face with his belt buckle and kicked Louie with his boots

Louie's face remained swollen and bruised most of his 2 years of internment. His ankle - remember, Louie was an Olympic runner who believed he could break the four-minute mile - his ankle was badly damaged. Louie suffered dysentery, beriberi, starvation, malnutrition, and multiple other diseases. He became emaciated, weighing at well under ninety-five pounds.

The Bird severely beat other men, too, only he seemed to beat Louie the worst. After the war, the Allies listed the Bird as number seven on the list of Japanese war criminals to capture and try. The Bird was never captured.

Louie, on the other hand, suffered severely after the war. He couldn't manage to resume a normal life in the United States - post traumatic stress disorder - He became an alcoholic, and the Bird haunted his dreams.

Louie would awake in cold sweats, imagining the Bird staring down at him, buckle in hand. Louie finally decided the only way to free himself from this hell was to accomplish justice - to find the Bird and murder him.

These thoughts of murder consumed Louie, it was all he could think about.

Three weeks ago, the United States found and killed Osama bin Laden. That Sunday night, we watched the fascinating story unfold. As a country, we rejoiced at bin Laden's death, for finally, we felt avenged.

Thousands of Americans thronged the White House gates; they lined Chicago streets, and Times Square in New York. Cheering and celebrating.

Watching all of this on CNN, my mind flashed briefly to the Wizard of Oz, the scene when the Munchkins celebrated the death of the Wicked Witch of the East:

*"Ding Dong, the Witch is Dead, which old witch? The wicked witch, Ding dong the wicked witch is dead."*

Sunday night, we sang, *"Ding Dong, bin Laden's Dead..."* I sang, too, exuberant that, at last, justice had been accomplished. For almost ten years, the murder of thousands went unpunished. The United States lived in justice unrequited.

People - countries - we - need a sense of public justice. We need to know that wrongs will be righted, that injustices will be corrected. When justice is not accomplished, when criminals escape with impunity, when wrongdoers go free, honest people are set on edge, and resent the unfairness.

The criminal justice system has multiple goals, and rehabilitation of the prisoner is only one of them. We imprison people (also) for the continued safety of the whole, and to achieve a public sense of justice.

Our American constitutional system accomplishes this "justice" using two types of laws in tandem: substantive law and procedural law.

Substantive law defines right and wrong. An example is a law that defines stealing as unacceptable and punishable.

Procedural law defines the method by which a person is brought to justice. An example is due process. We don't punish a person for committing a crime unless he is tried. The accused has the right to a jury, plus an attorney. Procedural laws.

We hold procedural law to be of equal importance to substantive law. But when one assumes greater weight than the other, society senses injustice.

For example, when criminals go free because every "i" has not been dotted in bringing the criminal to trial. Justice is not accomplished.

Some people complained that Osama bin Laden did not receive procedural due process. And let me say here, he was not an American and therefore not entitled to enjoy the American constitutional protection of due process.

Yet, due process is not just a legal issue, it is a moral issue. It is the right thing to do.

However, I would argue, and please feel free to disagree with me, justice was accomplished with regard to bin Laden.

He was a brutal murderer. He admitted as much publicly. Bringing him to trial would have revealed nothing less. We might have tried him, but the result would have been the same: conviction and punishment. Procedural justice would not have accomplished more *justice*, it would have slowed justice down.

Which is why we cheered.

Justice was accomplished, by bin Laden's killing. And yet, we should always remember - there is enormous danger in skipping trials.

That is what happened with the stoning of Stephen.

Jesus told his disciples *Don't be troubled*. Jesus was not offering pop psychology, here. He was not telling the twelve to "chill-out." Instead, he was telling them this: you are going to face evil - very soon.

Not just bad things, but evil -

And when you do, stand your ground. Do not let evil disturb you. Do not let it shake your faith. God will avenge evil, will right all injustice, be it now or in the future.

Stephen did just that. He stood firm in the face of evil. He was about to be stoned, condemned without due process.

No trial, no procedural justice.

He looked to heaven, saw through the veil to God on the throne, saw the temporal nature of evil on earth -

it won't last forever ...

and committed both himself and his killers to God.

The story is awful. It leaves one with a sense of injustice. Stephen was stoned wrongly, and his murder became a stain on the world.

Well - what are we to make of all this?

First, beware of the danger that we, as a society, can create injustice when we emphasize one aspect of law over the other, procedural over substantive, or vice versa.

For example, when criminals go free regularly because of procedural glitches, society is left with a sense of imbalance. Likewise, when we punish people for perceived wrongs, without trying them first -

think of the American Japanese internment camps during World War II.

Secondly - there is a distinction to be made between the need for societal justice - criminals must be punished - and the need for forgiveness.

Maintaining a just criminal justice system is vital to a free society, but as Christians, you and I are asked to forgive, for our own sake.

Society requires the exercise of justice; the soul requires the exercise of mercy.

Stephen kneeled down in death and cried out, *Lord, do not hold this against them.*

Louie Zampirini - who dreamed of murdering the Bird - finally, found his peace through forgiveness. He attended a

Billy Graham crusade. Billy Graham's words exposed his own darkness, the hatred that imprisoned him.

He was right to want public justice, but he wouldn't be saved until he forgave privately. He did that, and found God's peace. God in Christ freed Louie from the hatred that had become *his* prison.

You and I are free, now, from Osama bin Laden. Justice has been accomplished.

Now, can we forgive?