

Anticipating What Comes Next

By Paul R. Blake

During the singing of the invitation song, I put my songbook in the rack, pick up my coat and put it on, gather my Bible, notebook and class book, then I check my watch, nod to my children to gather their things together, all the while trying to distractedly sing an old familiar song from memory. What have I done? I've finished worshipping before the worship period has ended. I am now in the going home frame of mind and not focused on the unfinished worship of God.

I am certain you have noticed that after the conclusion of a sermon and before the extending of the invitation, I ask the audience to open song books, and I pause until they are finished. Experience taught me that I can't speak over song books sliding out of racks, and if I can't speak over it, erring Christians and sinners can't hear over it. When I start the invitation, most of the audience has finished listening and is setting their minds on singing before the sermon has ended. And I understand it. Most of the audience is in right standing with the Lord and unconsciously realizes that the invitation is not directed toward them. The problem with going out of listening mode into singing mode before the sermon has ended is that it is infectious, that is, it spreads to persons who really need to hear the invitation.

Anticipating what comes next often tempts folks into quitting the task at hand before the work is done. I frequently read of old soldiers of the cross who stood fast for sound doctrine for most of their lives, only to draw back or compromise with error near the end of their days. I have personally witnessed too many examples of Christians who survive long through some great trial or dire temptation, only to fall away just before the burden is lifted. How tragic to endure the greatest part of the trial only to quit just short of success. They went into the resting mode before the time of rest had come.

"On the plains of hesitation lie the bleached bones of countless millions, who, at the dawn of victory, sat down to rest, and resting, died" (Sam Ewing).

We are called to persevere unto the end of trials and tests, we must strive against sin until the end of our days, and we must work in the vineyard of the Master until we are called home. Never give up until you pass through the gates of heaven. (Heb. 10:35-39)

Second Chances and Mulligans

By Kent Heaton

If there was ever an deep desire in life it would be the opportunity to have a second chance to do things differently. As years roll into decades the hindsight of yesterday draws the mind to reflect on the decisions made early in life and the wish that somehow many of those choices could be changed or removed. Life is not about living without regrets but rather trying very hard to limit the regrets in life. There are always things we could have done better: to be a better son, more loving husband, giving attention to the children, spending time with others and focusing more on the words of God. Noble goals we sometimes fail at achieving but if given a second chance would do so much better?

In the game of golf there is a thing called a mulligan. A mulligan is a shot that allows a golfer to hit again after making a disastrous play. Often the mulligan can be as bad as the first shot. Within the rules of golf a mulligan is against the rules and the wish to have a second chance in life is also against the rules. In this short life we have but one chance and yet upon this short time our eternal destiny will rest. Would a second chance help?

In the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) Abraham told the rich man that it is impossible to receive a second chance at life. Realizing this, the man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to the home of his five brothers to warn them of the impending danger of torment. Again Abraham said this would not be possible and his five brothers had the same opportunity as the rich man. Consider for a moment if the rich man would be given a second chance. Would it make a difference? Does a second chance mean that people would live right and do what God said? Abraham reminded the rich man that if man would not listen to "Moses and the prophets" then a second chance would not help (v29).

The truth of man's nature is that a second chance would be no different because "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Perfection does not come from a second chance it comes from following the will of God. How many times did the Lord through the prophets warn the people of Judah that if they did not learn the lessons of her northern sister Israel the same fate would befall them? "And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did

not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also" (Jer. 3:7-8). Judah would not learn the second chance lessons from Israel.

If all men were given a second chance the same ruin would come upon them as in the beginning. Men are not saved by a second chance – men are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ that only came one time to save us. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb 9:27-28). The only time we have is now. Now is the day of salvation (2Cor. 6:2). There will be no second chance and no mulligans.

The Business of the Church

"I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:15).

An article in the Harvard Business Review talked about how some people didn't understand what business they were in. For example, the railroad people didn't realize they were in the transportation business; they thought they were in the railroad business. Had they realized they were in the transportation business, they would have invested in the airplane. The telegraph people thought they were in the telegraph business instead of the communication business. In 1886 or so, they could have bought all the telephone patents for \$40,000. So obviously those people didn't know what business they were in. (From Harvard Business Review, "Market Myopia")

Churches today need to ask themselves: "What kind of business are we in? Is it the entertainment, recreation, counseling, nutrition, worship services, or is not the soul-saving business the primary work of the church as assigned by the Lord?"

A Moments Wisdom

Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all.

It's not the hours you put in your work that counts, it's the work you put in the hours.

'Now' is the operative word. Everything you put in your way is just a method of putting off the hour when you could actually be doing your dream. You don't need endless time and perfect conditions. Do it now. Do it today. Do it for twenty minutes and watch your heart start beating."

Nothing is as embarrassing as watching someone do something that you said couldn't be done.

Nothing is as frustrating as arguing with someone who knows what he's talking about.

When you finally go back to your old home, you find it wasn't the old home you missed but your childhood.