

Every Winner takes a Chance on Losing

More often than not, they who do good service for God do so because they have made up their mind to "put-in" with God no matter what the cost or risk. There is a story about an old farmer who sat on the porch of a tumbledown farmhouse. A stranger stopped for a drink of water. Wishing to be agreeable he asked, "How is your cotton coming on?" "Don't have any," said the farmer. "Didn't you plant any?" asked the stranger. "Nope," was the reply; "We have boll weevils around here." "well," asked the stranger, "how is your corn?" "Didn't plant any," replied the farmer; "I was afraid there would be no rain." The visitor was abashed, but still cheerful. "Well, how are your potatoes?" "I didn't plant any –we have potato bugs around here" "Well, really, what did you plant?" asked the stranger. "Nothing; I'm just going to play it safe"



Schooner, Malabar X, Sailing Seneca Lake, NY

"They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in great waters, these see the work of the Lord and his wonders in the deep" (Psalm 107:23).

An enthusiastic young man came to Jesus one day with these fine words on his lips: "Lord I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied by saying, do you know where I'm going? "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). **I'm Homeless!**

When the young man heard that, his enthusiasm chilled. He refused to go farther, and said, "I may miss seeing much that I would like to see by going back; but at least I shall not have to go supperless to bed tonight, neither shall I have to sleep under the open sky. At any rate, I shall be safe.

The Psalmist does not approve of the young man of our text; he recognized that it is often necessary to venture. "They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in great waters, *these* see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." Every business, has attached a tag that reads, "cost of opportunity."

This was a big concession for the Psalmist to make, for the Jews were not a "sea-faring people." They regarded the sea with fear; to them, it was a thing of menace and mystery. When John thought of heaven he dreamed of a place that was not marred by dividing oceans and sundering seas. So he wrote, "And there was no more sea." To become a voyager was to give up almost everything that the Jew held dear. It was to say goodbye to friends. It was to give up his home in a quiet, settled village. It was to give up worship in the synagogue and the temple. It was to renounce his footing upon solid and stable earth. It was to face danger --to become a plaything of wind and wave --to endure privation and hardship. It was to face the possibility of going upon the rocks and making his grave an unmarked expanse of rolling water.

In spite of this risk, the Psalmist could not shut his eyes to the fact that there was much to be said for the claims of

the sea. While the seas divide the people of the earth, they also connect the people of the earth. If the voyager gave up much, he or she might also gain much. If there were great conflicts, there might also be great compensations. If there were great perils to be faced, there were also great prizes to be won. If there was danger of meeting with great reverses, there was also a possibility of achieving great rewards.

So he wrote, that they who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

The text presents us with two motives:

First, there is the prudential motive. This motive appeals to our fears; it appeals to our love of safety, security, and predictability. It tells us that the most important thing is to avoid danger, escape conflict, and dodge difficulty.

"Play it safe" is the motto here.

The second is the hope of adventure and reward. Instead of looking at the difficulties, this motive fixes upon the prizes to be won and the things to be seen by adventuring. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" is the motto here. It is the program of the one who dares. He or she may have a sane, intelligent knowledge of the importance of safety, but that is not his or her supreme reason for life. The big thing is to strive, to seek, to see, to wonder, to find, and not to quit, mold, and shrivel. It focuses attention upon the prizes to be won, rather than the difficulty to be dodged.

These two motives form a contrast in their appeals. They continue to make their appeal to every individual of every age. They are at our elbows this morning. It is what farming is about, what marriage is about, it is what being a Christian is about. It might rain; it might not rain, but always one must take a chance on getting all wet!

The safety-first motive speaks a convincing language. It lays before us a formidable array of risks that we may avoid by refusing to do business in the great waters of humanity. If you take this route far enough, it will be safer not to have been born. It is safer to do no business at all. Wherever there are humans there are wrong choices, sleepless nights, problems, suffering, and risk.

On the other hand, if you enter the world as a lower order of being your risks are greatly reduced. Still, few would choose to become a clam, taking only what comes by the flow of the tide; because the advantages are all negative --there is nothing on the positive side. There is never a gain to be made by taking the lower road.

If we never sob, neither do we sing. If our heart is never broken, neither is it ever happy. The price we pay to avoid sorrow, also loses for us the prospects of the contrasting joy we might have won. The price we pay for the incapacity to go wrong is an incapacity to go right. He or she who does nothing, make few mistakes, but does little good, has no adventure, and sees little wonder. "No-risk road" offers no real values. It only promises exemption from certain ills. We're in a new venture with our churches. This is a different road than I've ever seen --but, when one road is blocked, you take another. If the bridge is out, you go around.

But to the person who forgoes comfort and dares adventure there is the promise of great reward. Things will come to him or her that are utterly unknown to those who refuse to dare. That person will be thrilled by the discovery of wonders that must forever remain hidden from the one who refuses to do business in great waters --

to take a chance and reach out to other people.

Where, then, is this true? It is true in the realm of the physical, and it is true in the realm of the spiritual.

The person who ventures is the person who sees and discovers. All our knowledge has been brought to us by adventurers. The explorers were adventuresome people.

It is also true in the realm of the spiritual. In fact, there is absolutely no knowing God without adventuring. One reason we know so little of God today, in our personal experiences, is because we dare so little for Him. Isn't it true, when you set out on an adventure for God, people will tell you of the perils of the sea? Folk can think of a dozen reasons why something cannot be done. Even if, it does seem to be working. If they are to do anything for Christ, it must be a sure thing.

If our biggest voyages are confined to a mill pond, we will never have to fight the tempest, but it is equally certain that we will never go anywhere with our Lord Jesus either. God expects us to get out on the big oceans of peoples. Where there is gain to be made in the spiritual realm, there is risk to be taken, and a price to be paid.

The nation of Israel and the subsequent coming of Jesus Christ from that nation, and therefore hope for the world and Christianity itself, started when one day God said to Abraham, "Go from your father's house and from your kindred, and I will bless you and make you a blessing." It all started when Abraham left a sure thing and stepped into the unknown in an adventure of risk with God. That is exactly where we are.

Had he played the comfort and caution line he could have saved himself a great deal of trouble. Yet, at great sacrifice he set out. He dared all for God and his reward was that he came to be known as the "friend of God."

Moses was finding life easy and safe as a shepherd in the Midian desert. He was "far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife." Sure he was! He withdrew from people. He was playing it safe; he'd been burnt once --but not again. Yet, God called him to do a great service. The call involved danger, uncertainty, hardship, and sacrifice that only he and God will ever know. It also involved going back on the great sea of people. To Moses, they were the main danger. They were also to become the main reward. They are always the main reward. They were the main reward of Christ dying on the cross. People.

How much easier life would have been had he only said, "No!" How much suffering he would have missed. However, he would have missed something more than all that; he would have missed seeing the face of God on Mount Sinai. He would have missed talking with God as friend talks with friend. He would have missed being on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus. He would have missed giving us a large part of the Bible.

He was a great adventurer, ready to take risk for God --ready to win or lose. The reward would be in the journey itself. By venturing out, he would get to see the *works and wonders of the Lord*. Why do you suppose many older people are willing to spend large sums of money to travel? It is because they have discovered that the real reward in life is the journey itself. It has more to do with seeing and doing --with works and wonders, and very little to do with getting and accumulating. Why does it take so long to discover that?

There were two young men who came under the influence of Jesus --one of them a rich, young ruler. Jesus

said to him, "If you will be perfect, go your way, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and come and take up your cross and follow me." This young man went away. By doing so, he kept his wealth, he kept his palace, he kept his vineyards, he kept his servants. He kept them for as long as any of us can keep anything. In fact, his interview with Jesus cost him nothing.

But, there was another young man whose name was Stephen --brilliant and gifted. He was a deacon and one of the finest intellects of the early church. This man also heard the call of Jesus and ventured upon it. He dared all. In the eyes of some, he lost all, for he was mobbed and stoned.

But while they stoned him the Bible says, "his face was as the face of an angel." His last prayer was, "Father, lay not this sin to their charge." In one sentence he did more good than the rich, young ruler would do with his entire life. A "never ending war" is one where each side insists on the "pay-back" punch" Yet, Steven made it to the N.T.! So it was with Martin Luther King --"You did kill me; but, I still speak."

The young ruler also died, so far as we know, quietly in his bed. But, he never discovered that power that could enable a person to love enemies and bless them while they persecuted him. Of the two people, it is Stephen who has moved in history for the past 2,000 years, and continues to influence our lives today. My renewed hope for the church came from a group of forgiving black Christians in South Carolina after 9 of their soft-heart church members were gunned-down by nothing more than hate. I heard words of forgiveness, rather than words of fight, threat, and hate. Remember, Jesus did say, "If you don't forgive others, don't expect God to forgive you." Why? Because you are denying the very basis of salvation itself --which is forgiveness. The unforgiving may not be as saved as they claim to be. **I fear for the unforgiving church.** I fear for the "We will get you" church.

What kind of life are you to live? One that never dares anything? One whose biggest voyage is made in the safety of a bath tub? One that gives no time, and ventures nothing upon God?

Then you will make no discoveries. You will get no reward. You will not see the *works and wonders of the Lord in the deep*. You will not get to travel, see, and discover. You will live and die in ignorance of the things that really count. But, if you refuse the comfort and ease demon, if your talents, resources, and pride are ventured for God, you will learn for yourself that "they that go down to sea in ships, that do business in the great waters of the world's people, they are the ones that see the work of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

Sure there are droughts, boll weevils, and potato bugs; but we're going to plant a crop anyway. Given recent changes, we might have to plant a different way --but, we're still going to plant. God has a great deal for us to see and do. I want to see the wonder of every conversion. The metamorphosis of every changed life. The mystery of every bit of human growth. The splendor of every love. The miracle of every forgiveness. I want to see God's *works and wonders in the deep recesses of the human heart! Of The Heart!* Even when the waves are crashing about us, we can sail with the "hatches battened down" (as they are) --and still keep our ship on course --toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This present storms may have pushed our ship more deeply into the "Unknown Cyber Seas" --but, it won't keep us from sailing. We are just going to try to get better at "Cyber-Sailing." We're trying to fix the leaks and adjust the sails a bit --one nautical mile at a time. We'll face the next storm when it gets here. But, right now we are in the "Cyber Seas" --charting new territory.. Wonders in the deep. But, still sailing the save ship -the "Good Ship Grace."