

How Shall We Finish?

We have had a blessed couple of days over in the Atlanta area visiting a couple of our children and their children. It was nice to speak in Heather and Jared's church in McDonough and witness their youngest, Christopher be dedicated unto the Lord. We saw Josh and had a good visit with Aidan and Juliana north of Atlanta. Juliana literally lives on the Civil War battlefield at Kennesaw Mountain. As I was trying to get Caleb and Aidan interested in what took place there in 1864, they seemed only interested in what their big wheel and scooter could do on the very turf where grey and blue fought. Oh well, I guess when you are five and four, there are other things much more important than what Joseph Eggleston Johnston and William Tecumseh Sherman were doing 143 years ago. As much as I enjoy The War Between the States history, I will admit to you in writing, I became more interested in what my grandsons were up to at that moment. Yes, Barbara and I have become the traditional doting grandparents.

I spoke in the Christian school here in McDonough, Georgia yesterday and was really enjoying a visit with an old friend, David McCoy. I met Dave while he was attending college in Georgia many years ago. In our youth we were at the same youth camps, preached on the same platforms and we played several sets of tennis between Atlanta, Georgia and Dayton, Tennessee. David is one of the greatest natural athletes I have ever met. There is no doubt in my mind, had he so chosen, he could have easily had a career in the professional arena. Even today, his enthusiasm for sports has not abated. As I write these words, the school over which he presides is competing in four consecutive state championships this very weekend!

School was out and my grandson, Caleb, who loves his pastor and with whom he, like many other children, like to frolic with, saw Preacher Dave coming down the hallway and decided to try to get by him in a sweep down the hall. Now for an old football player like David McCoy, any smiling youngster that even looks like he wants to "best" him is in for a challenge. Caleb took off running (all bias aside, I was on Caleb's side in this skirmish); preacher Dave put on his game face and the fight was on! As Caleb got closer, Dave got positioned, looking much like he did preparing for my return after a strong serve. Then Dave lunged and something emotional took place in my heart, which is hard to express. You see, a couple of years ago David McCoy was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. On this day, Dave lunged, misstepped and froze. Everything looked the same as it did twenty years ago except for the misstep and freezing.

As the years go by we see the spiritual missteps of warriors in the battle. Those whom we started out with are getting fewer and fewer. Although David will not be trouncing me at tennis anymore, and his physical steps are numbered, he has done well and is in line for the Victor's Crown at the Judgment Seat of Christ. More than ever, I want to finish well. I want to face Jesus and as unworthy as I am, hear, "... *Well done, thou good and faithful servant...*" (Matthew 25:21). What will help us finish well?

1. Start where you stand.

It is best to start living for the Lord early, letting our first steps be His steps. Nothing can equal the value of a whole life lived for the Lord, every day in every way. "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Be encouraged if you are getting started later than you wish you had; you may still start where you stand. God is merciful and will find a way for the willing heart to recover and get going in the right direction. "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand*" (Psalm 37: 23, 24).

One of the most memorable moments in Olympic history came in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona at the 400 metres semi-final. UK's Derek Redmond was prepared to become the next gold medalist. Jim, Derek's father had become inseparable as they traveled from meet to meet to see dreams become a reality. Derek settles into the starting blocks, and then starts well, exiting the first bend in a model of controlled power. Then suddenly there is a cracking noise. He tries to focus and stay concentrated, he tries to regain rhythm, but something is badly wrong. Soon his left leg stops working. He crouches with his head in his hands as his seven rivals race to the finish. Derek attempts to hobble down the back straight with his one good leg. Derek refused the help of the officials running towards him with a stretcher. Here are Derek's own words about that day: "Everything I had worked for was finished. I hated everybody. I hated the world. I hated hamstrings. I hated it all. I felt so bitter that I was injured again. I told myself I had to finish. I kept hopping round. Then, with 100 metres to go, I felt a hand on my shoulder." It was his dad! Jim had bolted from his seat, ran to the track, and with his strong arm around his boy, helped him find his lane and finish the race to a crowd of 70,000 standing, cheering people.

Don't worry; God will come to your aid when you need Him! If you have fallen, get up. "*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*" (Isaiah 41:10).

2. Keep your eye on the prize.

There are three thoughts we need to have in mind according to Philippians 3:13. 1) The tenacious pursuit of one thing we can do well: "...*this one thing I do...*". Everyone has one great motivational gifting from God. Let us therefore, discover what it is and do it! 2) Get past the past: "*forgetting those things which are behind...*". This is sometimes easier said than done, but rather than argue if you can, just do it anyway. I have been watching my grandson ride his bike with training wheels. As he goes around his cul-de-sac, his little training wheels were not helping; they were actually in the way of the balancing act he was inadvertently performing. His father removed them today and after Dad tried to get him to stay up on two wheels, I gave it the old college try. Caleb kept saying, "I can't," as he peddled. Finally, I said, "Repeat after me: I can stay up, I can do this." As of this writing he hasn't done so, but he shall! He will be up when he gets over his dependency on training wheels. There may be some reading this who are convinced the sins and set backs have incapacitated you to perform in God's work. You've got to get beyond it and 3) Stretch into God's possibilities: "...*reaching forth unto those things which are afore*" (Philippians 3:13). "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Hebrews 12:2). Christ and His will for our life is the prize!

3. Contemplate the legacy you leave.

Consider your life like a book; how will your final chapter will read? Are you the hero or the villain? Plan today on not making an immoral or heretical misstep. Finish well! Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*"

We can leave wealth behind, but that is, at best, temporary. We can leave popularity behind, but that is as valuable as a flashing comet. The Bible says, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold*" (Proverbs 22:1).

A good name is more valuable than any amount of wealth you can leave behind. Stand and leave a good testimony: "*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13).

-Pastor Pope-

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