

## One More Move

(Excerpts taken from John Ortbergs talk at Willow Creek)

*Sunday, January 8, 2006*

So how are those New Years resolutions going? Last week I read in USA today that 65% of all Americans have backslid on their New Years commitments by January 15<sup>th</sup>. In light of that I have decided not to start mine until Jan 16<sup>th</sup>.

Why is it that keeping our commitments is so difficult? There are significant moments and events in our life that have life changing potential and transformation is just a breath away and then we slip right back into our destructive habits and behaviors. Just this past week I spent 4 days with 18,000 college students for what was one of the most powerful and passionate weeks of worship I have ever experienced. Yet, what is likely to happen is that most of them like us will be challenged, convicted, moving on to transformation and then before you know it the passion is gone. We develop a defeatist attitude, an excuse driven subsystem for explaining the failures in our life. This comes primarily through the brokenness of life we find at ever turn.

Paul knew all about this, it was he that said,..."**I do the things I do not want to do and the things I want to do I do not**". What Paul knew is that we are all wasting away and every aspect of our life reminds us that we losing the battle against time. Hear what Paul writes in **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:7-9 & 16-18 (read)**

What Paul is saying is that there is both an inner and outer you, the treasure is the life God has given us which is contained in jars of clay.

- There is an outer you-one that is visible to the world, the one that everyone sees
- There is an inner you- This is your soul, the housing place of your character and integrity
- Your outer you is temporary
- Your inner you has eternal potential

- Your outer you is susceptible to be persecuted, wounded, hurt, imprisoned and sick. It is fragile...it will break.
- Your inner you no one can touch without your permission, it cannot be stolen

Your outer you is wasting away, sooner or later old man wrinkle is coming for everybody and if you doubt this is true, take a look at the person sitting next to you. All right don't stare!!!

At about age 25 your outer you begins to experience a number of changes. Your bones become more brittle, your skin begins to be more elastic and then there are age spots, you look down at your hands one day and you realize you have your parents hands. After age 25 you begin to lose brain cells at an alarming rate (if you are very quiet you can hear some dying right now). Weight begins to shift from the poles of your body to the equator. Your hair will stop growing where you want it to grow and boldly go where no hair has gone before.

At one time or another we all believe it wouldn't happen to us. The fact is outwardly we have all begun the slow rot and all the working, praying, hoping and buying ways to renew the outer man are all temporary solutions to a permanent problem. Thus the defeatist attitude. The part of us that everybody sees has a shelf life.

### **Inner You**

But you have an inner you, one that is capable of everlasting life, capable of growing without shrinking, maturing without spoiling and yet it is the part of you and me we do the least with. It is the conflict between whether we focus on what is seen or what is unseen. Remember what God told Samuel when he sent him looking for Israel's new king? He said, **"But the Lord said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected them, The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks**

**at the heart”**. God’s focus is different. Our focus needs to be different!

There is something in you, your character, your integrity that is infinitely more important to God than how you look, its important because he put it there. When Paul writes to Corinth he writes to a church and community that has problems and stuff just like you and I, optimism will never be enough. Paul says, your body is going south in a hurry, and not just because of natural aging but also because of the stressors life brings. Paul knew this for certain because by this writing he had been stoned twice, beaten and imprisoned nothing in his outer life was on the upswing, and yet all Paul talks about is rejoicing in all situations. The reality for Paul is something was going on inside that was completely opposite of what was going on outside.

The outside is dying a little bit everyday, but inside we keep growing, getting a little stronger every day, Joy can be bubbling up even when life seems like a train wreck. The reason we miss this is because of what we focus our eyes on. The treasure is what is important, the clay pot is just like all our stuff, our status our finances and for sure our bodies, it is wasting away.

The greatest testimony to this phenomenon in scripture is found in the book of **John chapter 11 (turn there if you like)**. It is the story of Lazarus and his sister Martha and Mary. These are close friends of Jesus, and then just like happens to all of us so often a crisis comes. We don’t know for sure what happens, but Lazarus gets a lump, a bad cough, unexplained pain you know the kind of stuff that happens to us every day. He sees the only medical help of the day and they just shrug their shoulders, no certain answers just more questions, happens to us every day.

The sisters are desperate, they send word to Jesus, Lord the one you love is sick. They know what you and I know that Jesus can heal. They had seen him do it, seen him do it for total strangers, seen him do it for people whose names and faces were

unknown, they had seen him do it for immoral people, for people who didn't deserve it surely he will come...and optimism lives.

Then an interesting thing happens, the unexpected occurs Jesus delays. If someone say's they need you, what do you do...you come right away. Someone recently gave me a great analogy for friendship, they said when they needed their friends to come they would expect them to buy a plane to get there if they had too. Well this is Martha and Mary's expectation, however Jesus doesn't come right away, he waits 2 days. This seems like a strange thing to Martha and Mary, it seems strange to us when we read it, they don't understand it and really we don't either. We so quickly forget that God's ways and our ways are not the same.

You see Lazarus and his sisters live in Bethany not far from Jerusalem, Jerusalem had not been a safe place for Jesus the last time he was there, they had threatened to stone him. Everyone knows it's dangerous to go near Jerusalem, in verse 16 look at what Thomas says (**Read verse 16**). Not exactly Dale Carnegie or Zig Ziegler is he? Thomas is kind of the Eeyore of Disciples; he knows full well what it is like to succumb to negativity.

Now by the time Jesus gets there, Lazarus is not only dead but has been in his tomb for 4 days and in verse 21 Martha peaks a familiar phrase, **Lord, If you had only been here?** If only is a powerful cry. We see Mary make the same statement in verse 32. Everyone in this room this morning has some "if only's" in their life...

- If only I had not said those words
- If only I had made a wiser choice
- If only I had cashed out of NASDAQ at 5000, or 4000...or 3000
- If only I had spent more time with my kids
- If only I had gone to the Doctor sooner
- If only I had told her I loved her more often
- If only I had stopped smoking
- If only I had spoken the truth

- If only I had said please forgive me
- If only I had said I forgive you

I could go on and on, our lives are dotted with “If only’s”, and sometimes it feels like our if onlys are the end of the story. But what we all need to realize this morning is that they are not the end.

What happens next is so profound, what Jesus says next no one else in all of history has said, not Confucius, not Buddha, not even Mohammed. **Read vs. 25-26**

There are times when I do not understand God’s timing, when something is going on and I am frustrated and I don’t have all the answers I am forced to answer the question Jesus asks Martha, do I believe this? Will I trust the unseen, will I persevere... trusting the promises of God, because ultimately it will be a statement about what my eyes are fixed on.

Dr Martin Luther King once said there is a big difference between optimism and hope.

- **Optimism** is belief in progress, optimism is belief that circumstances are going to get better, optimism fixes its eyes on what is seen and therefore is on pretty shaky ground, therefore is can get delusional because outwardly we all are wasting away.
- **Hope** on the other hand he said, was the conviction that there is another reality, another kingdom, and that Kingdom exists and has existed throughout all of eternity...and it is doing well and it will prevail. That is Hope!

The time has come for the Lord of the Universe to declare Hope, He stands before the tomb and the tomb calls the question...what do you believe? What have you placed your trust in?

Think about the prayer that we teach our children before bedtime?  
**Now I lay me down to sleep I pray my Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake I pray my Lord my soul to take**  
(Isn't that a cheery way to send our kids off to bed) Good theology, little morbid but good theology. Did you know there is a second verse?

Here it is, **Our days begin with trouble, here our life is but a span, and cruel death is always near, so frail a thing is man.**  
(Goodnight honey pleasant dreams)

Death is real; outwardly we are all wasting away, but death is not the end, for should I die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take...That's Hope! That is not optimism it's a certainty of the unseen.

A number of years ago the voice of Looney Toons Mel Blanc passed away, you may remember at the end of all their cartoons Porky Pig would come on and say, "That's all folks". In other words shows over... time to go home. Do you know what his family put on his tombstone... "That's all folks"?

Every tomb calls the question is Porky Pig right, "That's all folks", the shows over (Pause) OR is there a life stronger than death a place where we do not lose heart?

Back to John 11, the thought of Jesus opening a sealed tomb after four days begins to freak Martha out a little bit, maybe her last name is Stewart either way she knows it is going to be bad (**read vs. 30**). What she is trying to say to Jesus is xnay on the onesta!  
She knows Lazarus is dead, pushing up daisy's... That's all folks!

But a great lesson is unfolding, had it all gone down the way Mary and Martha wanted it to the glory of God that is about to unfold before them would never have happened, and in that Moment the

one who had mastered life now demonstrates his mastery over death and instantly proves Porky Pig wrong, that's not all folks.

The grave is not the end and Therefore, and Therefore we do not lose hope.

Dr. Kenneth Ulmer tells the story of a friend of his who is an international chess champion and together they were visiting Chicago. They went to the Chicago Museum of Art and began to walk around when a painting entitled "Checkmate" captivated Dr. Ulmer's friend, after all he is an international chess champion. In the painting a very foreboding man is leaning over a chessboard with his meek looking opponent down to his last man...the King. Intrigued the chess champion sat down and began to study the painting, this went on for hours, finally, and Dr. Ulmer said what is it that has so engrossed you. The chess champion replied, we must find the man who painted this picture and tell him it is wrong. He must change the title or repaint it, because I have studied it and determined that while the painting is called "Checkmate" the title misreads the board...**THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!** This is the story of God

- Little David up against Goliath, Saul's armor is a 52 long and David is a 36 short, the odds look bad, but fear not... **THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**
- A man named Daniel is put into a den of lions for failure to stop praying to his God, the lions are hungry but by morning God had put the lions on a low protein diet and Daniel was fine you see... **THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**
- A man named Moses convinces a nation of oppressed slaves to run away from the most powerful man on earth, early in their departure they find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red sea, all seems lost, the people look at Moses and said what were you thinking? Moss looks

at God and says what were you thinking, it looks bad but...  
**THE KING HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**

Therefore, Therefore we do not lose hope for these light and momentary troubles of our life are all for God's Glory, God's not done!

After healing Lazarus, Jesus turns towards Jerusalem and knows this is the trip that costs him his life. Sure enough on that Friday morning, they tried him and judged him, whipped and beat him, scorned and mocked him then hung him on a cross to die. They laid him in a tomb to rot the way every human body had rotted since death entered this sorry dark world and they declared That's all folks, shows over, checkmate, time to go home...but they were wrong because **THE KING STILL HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**  
And therefore, therefore we do not lose heart.

I don't know everything facing each of you as we begin this New Year

- Maybe it's a health deal
- Maybe it's a Stress deal
- Maybe it's a work thing
- Maybe your marriage is falling apart
- Maybe it's a financial deal
- Maybe it's a mistake that's so big you can't even imagine redemption
- Maybe it's issues with your children
- Maybe you or a loved one is facing what Lazarus faced

Whatever you face today or tomorrow, the promise of Jesus is not a promise of optimism but one of Hope, the promise that even though it may feel like Checkmate, that its not all folks because...  
**THE KING ALWAYS HAS ONE MORE MOVE!**

Let us Pray!