

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Sermon Preached at

Stouffville United Church United on

Sunday August 14 2022 by

the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Finish Strong”

Can Atheists Get Insurance for Acts of God?”

Ninth in the Series: Lessons Learned from Noah’s Ark

Genesis 8 1-22

Coming home from his Little League game, Billy swung open the front door very excited. Unable to attend the game, his father immediately wanted to know what happened. "So, how did you do son?" he asked. "You'll never believe it!" Billy said. "I was responsible for the winning run!"

"Really? How'd you do that?" "I dropped the ball."

Are you going to be ready? Or are you going to drop the ball?

I

Finishing strong involves *being open*. Noah was open to God. From the very beginning when others didn't believe Noah did. He was open.

Openness to the possibility of being changed or challenged by God is the beginning of wisdom. If we are not open, nothing ever happens; for every life changing possibility starts with being open to answer to a problem you are facing.

Noah was open. Many people aren't. They aren't open because of their bitterness or anger, or rebellion, stubbornness, or prosperity, self-sufficiency They say, "We can wait it out." "We can weather this" "I don't need any help." "I can do it myself." "I don't need God."

The fact is; many times we can do it ourselves and weather the storms that come. The problem is, there are times when we can't. There are times when the wall is too high, the battle too big, the problem too large for us to take on alone.

"Boxer Mike Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan 'till they get punched in the mouth." It's amazing how easily our plans are derailed. If you've ever planned a trip, a church event, a family gathering, or the launch of a business plan, you know to expect the unexpected. Sometimes life punches us in the mouth.

Our Almighty God has a plan for our lives, and His plans are never derailed. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet Jeremiah warned his people of coming judgment and impending invasion. The nation of Judah was about to be punched in the mouth. But God's plans were undeterred, and Jeremiah reassured them of their eventual return and restoration to the land. "“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you... plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

It's important to plan and prepare for life. But if your plans have suffered a setback, don't let discouragement overtake your mind. Your heavenly Father loves you, He knows all about it, and His plans will unfold with grace and mercy, in His timing, and for His glory."

We are all in the hands of God. No one gets out of this life alive. There is 100% *mortality rate*. Yet, sometimes in life we are faced with a situation that we cannot solve; when the all is too high and the battle too big, and the problem is too much for us and if we are open – just open for God to do something – things happen.

II

Finishing Strong involves being open and ***being optimistic*** – *attitude is everything* Noah was an optimist. An optimist is one who sees the rose and ignores the thorns. A pessimist is one who sees the thorns and is oblivious to the beauty of the rose or even the presence of the rose. When you face life; do you do so as an optimist or a pessimist? This will determine your destiny.

Helen Keller once said, "No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit." She was right.

Jimmie Davis is not necessarily a name too many of you would be familiar with. He was a man who climbed from poverty to plenty, from obscurity as a share-cropper country boy to prominence; from being a farm boy to a famous two-term Louisiana Governor. He also became famous at the same time as a country folk singer while in office and a man who knew first-hand the power of optimism.

He knew as Joshua did about how to live to the full and did so for well over 100 years old by his optimism and his faith in God. He used to quote from the Psalm 84:10 "No good thing will God withhold from them who walk uprightly."

He was also the man who wrote the song "You are my sunshine"- which became the official State song of Louisiana.

What many people don't know is that it was not written about his girlfriend or wife or child. It was written about it horse. He loved that horse and would often bring it into his office (the Governor's office). It was said, by a reporter at the event when he did that. That it was the first time in the history of Louisiana or any government that both ends of the horse were in the office and not just one.

Being ready for anything life throws at you involves being optimistic.

Helen Keller, was one who know great difficulty also said, "Keep your face to the sunshine and you will never see the shadow."

III

Finishing Strong involves being open, optimistic and ***being ready for opportunities***. Opportunities came Noah's way as a result of being open and optimistic. He could have ignored the warnings that kept everyone else from joining him. He could have refused to make use of the opportunity. He could have simply done nothing; as the rest of those around him did in the past. If he had, everything would have been lost. But because he was open; because he was optimistic and ready and willing to make use of whatever opportunity came his way, all was not lost.

People fail to achieve in life because they fail to take advantage of the opportunities before them. Napoleon once said, that "Ability is of little account without opportunity." You can have all the ability in the world but unless you take advantage of the opportunity before you it is of no worth at all.

Harry Truman said, "A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties.

In life it is often the little things that make a big difference. The little opportunities taken, rather than the large ones that never come our way.

Karen was a young mother of a 3-year-old and found out that another baby was on the way. She did what she could to help her 3-year-old son, Michael, prepare for a new sibling. They found out that the new baby was going to be a girl, and day after day, night after night, Michael sang to his sister in Mommy's tummy. He was building a bond of love with his little sister before he even met her.

The pregnancy progressed normally for Karen, an active member of the Panther Creek United Methodist Church in Morristown, Tennessee. In time, the labor pains came. Soon it was every five minutes, every three, every minute. But serious complications arose during delivery and Karen found herself in hours of labor. Would a C-section be required? Finally, after a long struggle, Michael's little sister was born. But she was in very serious condition. With a siren howling in the night, the ambulance rushed the infant to the neonatal intensive care unit at St. Mary's Hospital, Knoxville, Tennessee.

The days inched by. The little girl got worse. The pediatrician had to tell the parents there is very little hope. Be prepared for the worst. Karen and her husband contacted a local cemetery about a burial plot. They had fixed up a special room in their house for their new baby but now they found themselves having to plan for a funeral. Michael, however, kept begging his parents to let him see his sister. "I want to sing to her", he kept saying.

Week two in intensive care looked as if a funeral would come before the week was over. Michael kept nagging about singing to his sister, but kids are never allowed in Intensive Care. Karen decided to take Michael whether they liked it or not. If he didn't see his sister right then, he may never see her alive. She dressed him in an oversized scrub suit and marched him into ICU. He looked like a walking laundry basket. The head nurse recognized him as a child and bellowed "Get that kid out of here now. No children are allowed."

The mother rose up strong in Karen, and the usually mild-mannered lady glared steel-eyed right into the head nurse's face, her lips a firm line. "He is not leaving until he sings to his sister" she stated. Then Karen towed Michael to his sister's bedside. He gazed at the tiny infant losing the battle to live. After a moment, he began to sing.

In the pure-hearted voice of a 3-year-old, Michael sang: "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray." Instantly the baby girl seemed to respond. The pulse rate began to calm down and become steady.

"Keep on singing, Michael," encouraged Karen with tears in her eyes. "You never know, dear, how much I love you, please don't take my sunshine away." As Michael sang to his sister, the baby's ragged, strained breathing became as smooth as a kitten's purr. "Keep on singing, sweetheart." "The other night, dear, as I lay sleeping, I dreamed I held you in my arms". Michael's little sister began to relax as rest, healing rest, seemed to sweep over her. "Keep on singing, Michael."

Tears had now conquered the face of the bossy head nurse. Karen glowed. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. Please don't take my sunshine away..."

The next, day...the very next day, the doctor call and said, could you please have your son come back and sing. We don't understand it that she is a little better. He did and he sang with her all the way home

Woman's Day Magazine called it The Miracle of a Brother's Song. The medical staff just called it a miracle. Karen called it a miracle of God's love. Never give upon on the people you love, be ready, stay open, and optimistic about all of life's opportunities.

And work like you don't need the money.

Love like you've never been hurt.

Dance like nobody's watching.

Sing like nobody's listening.

Live like it's Heaven on Earth

You think about that. Amen