

"GOOD INTENTIONS"

A Sermon By

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the Guinness Book of Records, the record for an unreturned overdue library book was set when a book borrowed from the Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge, England in 1667 was returned some 288 years later by a professor who had come across it in another library of the college. The college did not attempt to exact a fine.

The most overdue book in the United States was a book on febrile diseases by Dr. J. Currie which was checked out in 1823 from the University of Cincinnati Medical Library and returned on December 7th, 1968 by the great-grandson, Richard Dodd, of the borrower. The calculated fine of \$2,264 was waived. Trivia.

Today's Scripture Lesson tells us about a father who had two sons. He went to the first and said,

ONE

"Go and work in my vineyard today, my son." The boy said, "All right, sir," but he never went near the vineyard. Later the father approached the second son with the same request, but the second son said, "I won't". Afterward, he changed his mind and went. And Jesus then asked, "Which of these two did what the father wanted?"

### FIRST SON: GOOD INTENTIONS

ONE

The first son had good intentions and don't you agree that that should count for something? He did not rebel when his father asked him to work out in the field. He didn't talk back to him. He had good intentions. That much we can say about him.

An old "westerner" was talking with some tourists from the Eastern part of the states. Quite clearly he was enjoying himself as he said to them,

"There I was...trapped in a narrow canyon with a grizzly five yards away...behind a tree. The only way to hit him was to ricochet a bullet off the high canyon wall on my right. I'm a champion shot, as you know, so I quickly gauged my windage, calculated the length of the barrel and the rate of twist. I balanced this with the hardness of the bullet and the angle of the yaw it would have after smacking out of shape against the wall. I judged my chances of nailing this bear about 80-20. A one-rail bank shot - a controlled ricochet. So...I took aim and I fired!"

The old western cowboy paused....and one of the tourists asked, "yes...yes, and did you hit him?" "Nope" answered the old man. "I missed the danged wall!"

Good intentions. We all have them and it's a danged shame that good intentions are not enough. Why, we'd all be millionaires if they were! Nothing trivial.

Someone with pretty good intentions was written up some time back in Life magazine. His name was Gould Levison. He was a photographer and inventor. In the early days of photography, the cameras were large, stationary and slow-working...hardly conducive to shooting candid photographs or what Levison called "instantaneous pictures" Let me tell you more about him and what he did.

So he and his partner George Bradford Brainerd invented their own camera, which they patented in 1885...as the Brainerd - Levison Hand Camera. The pair took the camera along on some outings on the Jersey shore, then up to the Canadian forests and then to some scenic spots near homes in Brooklyn. Unfortunately, their partnership ended with Brainerd's death in 1887 at the age of 41.

That same year, Levison invented a camera that could take a series of pictures in rapid succession and this was a real breakthrough. But unfortunately, the distractions of family concerns and other projects kept him from completing the paperwork to record and to patent his invention. This delay cost him his shot at immortality. In 1891, Thomas Edison also invented a camera that would take pictures in rapid succession but it was he - not Levison - who patented the motion picture camera.

Goold Levison intended to patent his own camera, and of that we can be sure. But there were other pressing matters, however, and he never got around to it. Good intentions? Yes...and some unknown author has put it this way:

"He was going to be all that a mortal should be - TOMORROW.  
No one would be better than he - TOMORROW.  
Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write -  
TOMORROW.

It was too bad indeed he was too busy to see Bill,  
but he promised to do it - TOMORROW!  
The greatest of workers this man would have been - TOMORROW.  
The world would have known him had he ever seen - TOMORROW.  
But the fact is he died and faded from view, and all that  
was left when living was through  
Was a mountain of things he intended to do - TOMORROW!"

Good intentions. Yes, we all have them. We're so good at putting off doing those things we should do today 'til tomorrow and for many of us tomorrow never comes. Sadly enough...tomorrow never comes.

There was an article in the LA Times by Ann Wells that told about the many preparations made for her sister's funeral. Her brother-in-law handed Ann a lovely box in which lay a gorgeous silk and lace night-gown. It had never been worn, never even removed from the box. The brother-in-law explained to Ann that her sister had bought the night-gown many years ago and was always saving it for "that" very special occasion, but that special occasion never seemed to come, and so this exquisite gown had gone unused. And now Ann's sister was dead, and she would never have the opportunity to wear it. Her brother-in-law admonished Ann to never save anything for a special occasion, because everything is a special occasion. She took his words to heart and writing in this article, said:

"I'm not saving anything....we use our good china and our good crystal for every special event....such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, the first camellia... and every morning when I first open my eyes I tell myself that it is special."

A good cure for unrealized intentions. I like that and as one who tends to save everything....I'm going to loosen up and live each day as if it's special.

Dale Carnegie once said that one of the most tragic characteristics of human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We're all guilty of dreaming of some magical rose gardens...over the horizon....instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.

Good intentions. We don't know why the first son never got to do his chores. Was it procrastination? Or did something or someone more appealing come along? We don't know, but we do know that it's very much a part of our human nature to make commitments that we do not keep...to make promises that go unfulfilled....to leave behind a mountain of good intentions. It happens all the time....all around...yes, even in the church. You better believe it!

It's called The Center For Creative Leadership and it's located down in Greensboro, North Carolina. They recently released a study of twenty-one "high potential" executives who were terminated or forced to retire early from their companies. The "ONE" universal character flaw, according to this study, which always led to downfall was not doing something that was promised!

A teacher from my early years said something that has stayed with me across many years. Talking about character, he said,

"Character is the ability to carry out a resolution long after the mood in which it was made has left you...."

What about commitments and pledges and promises and resolutions previously made in terms of your life, your church, your community concerns. How are you going with them? A new season beckons. Take stock. Get caught up. Don't let those good intentions never get fulfilled. Much is at stake.

SECOND SON: WORKED IN THE VINEYARD

*OTHER*  
The second son did work in the vineyard of his father. And to me, that's surprising. After all, remember that at first he played the rebel.

"No, dad.....I'm not going to work in your vineyard today. I've got some friends coming over and we're going to the mall. It's a drag working in your vineyard. Why are you always picking on me...get someone else."

You know how it goes. But then along the way to the mall with his friends, a funny thing happened. He changed his mind. He changed his direction and went obediently...did the work of his father...there in the hot vineyard, as asked!

We live a lifetime trying to find out how to live and even at its longest the race we run is short. Some present may not have tomorrow to turn things around. It may have to be now. As we put on the bulletin board out front earlier this week,

"Today is the first day.....of the rest of your life!"

Let me ask you a question. If you knew that you only have a short time to live, what changes would you make in your life? Would you make any at all? Are there promises you've made that you have not kept or some good intentions that you have not carried out? The sad truth of life is that we don't have that much time. And if you and I are going to be all that God has called us to be, we need to begin right now - today. If we are going to do the things that God has called us to do, we will need to do them now.

Go back with me to our Biblical text and to this story that Jesus told that launched this Homecoming Sunday message.

"A father had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Go and work in my vineyard today...my son'. The boy said, 'All right, sir'....but he never went near the vineyard.

Then the father approached the second son with the same request but the second son said, 'I won't'. And afterward, he changed his mind and went. 'Which of these two' Jesus then asked, 'Did what the father wanted?'"

It gives us something to think about, doesn't it?

The great Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, once told a story of a flock of geese that was starting to head south to escape the blast of the wintry winds. The first night they landed in a farmer's yard and filled themselves with corn. Next morning they flew on....all of them, except one.

"The corn is good" this big geese said, "So I will stay and enjoy it another day". The next morning he decided to wait still another day...and then another after that, enjoying the delicious food...the corn was so good.

Pretty soon he developed a habit. "Tomorrow I will fly south" he said. Then came that inevitable day when the winds of winter were so severe that waiting longer would mean death in the frozen wastes. And so he stretched his wings and waddled across the barnyard, picking up speed as he went. But alas! He was now too fat to fly. He had waited too long!

Someone once put it like this...

Jesus said, "Follow Me"...but we work to evaluate the meaning of this statement. What is the intent? Jesus said, "Follow Me"...but you know I secretly question the results of such action. We could lose members and cause divisions. Jesus said, "Follow Me"...but I really think we should come together at another time...sit down and discuss this. The hours and days are not convenient. Jesus said, "Follow Me", but I think we should as a staff write a paper and then we can react with more information. Jesus said, "Follow Me"...but what will it cost me in dollars. Our budget is already so tight. Jesus said, "Follow Me"...but have we got the time to give to this commitment?

Then a voice from Heaven was heard, "For Jesus' sake and your own...just follow Him!"

A father had two sons.....and he went to the first and said...

#### PRAYER

Help each of us, Lord, to follow through on all of those good intentions and confirm within each of us...the decisions and resolutions...the renewal of commitments and promises of other days...in these moments at the end of this service. Wrestle with us in the deep corners of our hearts where caution and doubt and lack of energy and enthusiasm so often prevent us from rising up and "following" after Him. In His spirit we pray. Amen.