The Tragedy of Almost

Allen Webster

After sixty-two-year-old miner William Hyatt’s car broke down, he walked twenty-two miles through the Mojave Desert, crawling the last two before collapsing from thirst and exhaustion. He died face down in the sand. Just over the hill—a half mile away—was Saratoga Springs. He almost made it to safety.

After World War II ended, a soldier called his mother from Europe saying, “I’m coming home.” He had fought four years, survived horrific battles, and was there when the Allies won. He soon arrived in the U.S. and boarded a small plane for Dallas. Tragically, it crashed. He almost made it home.

On February 1, 2003, the space shuttle Columbia returned from its twenty-eighth mission. Having spent sixteen days in space, it was sixteen minutes from landing. Families had gathered in Houston to welcome loved ones home. Something went terribly wrong. A piece of foam insulation broke off and damaged a wing, and the force and heat of reentry caused the Columbia to disintegrate and rain down in pieces over Louisiana and Texas. Seven astronauts almost made it back.

King Agrippa listened to Paul preach. The apostle was a compelling speaker, and the gospel was a powerful message (Acts 14:12; Hebrews 4:12). Agrippa understood the teaching; he believed the prophets (Acts 26:26–27). Yet he said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (26:28). He was as close to heaven’s door as he would ever be, but Agrippa only almost made it.

Since salvation is the world’s most valuable commodity (Matthew 16:26), missing out on it is life’s greatest tragedy. Agrippa was not the last to be “almost” a Christian. Many in each generation come to the kingdom’s gate (Mark 12:34), and then walk away.

Let’s explore why people are only almost persuaded.

“I HAVE A REPUTATION TO UPHOLD.”

Agrippa may have sent Paul away because he did not want to admit he was a sinner needing a Savior. He and Bernice arrived with great pomp (Acts 25:23), indicating a love for ostentation and hinting at pride. Perhaps he saw himself as “the master of his fate, the captain of his soul,” who needed governing and absolution from no one. A king bowing to a Carpenter?

There are two primary reasons people reject Jesus today:

- They do not think that they need a Savior. Many consider themselves basically good—better than most—and find it hard to admit sin. Repentance is unpalatable. What will people think? (cf. John 12:42–43; Matthew 27:24). What might they say?
- They do not think they want a Lord. Proclaiming allegiance to Jesus means He becomes ruler of one’s life. That is scary to many people. Yet His yoke is easy (Matthew 11:28–30). He does a much better job managing our lives than we ever could (Jude 1:24).

To modern readers, Pharisees are pitiable religious caricatures so proud of their
knowledge and goodness that they were blind to how others—especially Jesus—saw them (John 9:41; Luke 18:9–14). They were in the presence of deity but did not recognize Him (John 1:10). They witnessed a perfect life—love personified—and heard majestic sermons yet missed salvation.

Before we judge them, we may have similar difficulty in seeing ourselves as God does. The first plank on the road to Christ’s kingdom is humility (Matthew 5:3). One does not come to Jesus with his nose in the air, making demands. He comes with his hand out, making confession. God hates a proud look (Proverbs 6:16–17), but He never despises a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

“TAlE BUSY ALREADY. I DON’T NEED ANYTHING ELSE TO DO.”

Life is busy. Many work forty, fifty, sixty, or more hours a week. Then there are children’s games to attend, grass to mow, meals to prepare, clothes to fold, vacations to arrange, and spouses to love. To such people, even the thought of adding another item to the to-do list is daunting. They think, “I probably need to go to church services, but I have a hard time keeping all the balls in the air already. Besides, Sunday is my only day to relax.”

Henry David Thoreau said, “It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?” Jesus was busy about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49).

Christianity is the most positive part of life—it is abundant living (John 10:10). It doesn’t so much take energy as it gives it; or require motivation as provide it. It is the part that makes all other parts make sense. It connects the dots. It gives breadth, depth, color, and resonance to each day and decade.

Trying to find satisfaction in careers, money, hobbies, pleasures, relationships, and possessions is ultimately a failing proposition. They are, to use the prophet’s phrase, “cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). Because man is a spiritual being (Genesis 2:7), he cannot find true, lasting satisfaction in merely physical accomplishments and activities (Isaiah 55:1–3). In making a living, we must not forget to make a life worth living.

Belief comes from understanding these facts. Conviction to act comes from applying the conclusion these facts support. Since Jesus requires confession (Matthew 10:32; cf. Romans 10:9–10), He will strengthen us to accomplish it (Philippians 4:13). Angels cheer repenting sinners (Luke 15:10). Saints excitedly welcome returning prodigals (Romans 14:1; 3 John 1:8).

“I’M JUST AS GOOD AS ANYBODY IN THE CHURCH. I DON’T NEED IT.”

It is not a matter of being good; it is a matter of being forgiven. All sinners need forgiveness, for they can never save themselves (Romans 10:3; Titus 3:3–5). Since every mature person on earth, of every rank and all regions, has sinned (Romans 3:23; 6:23), there is a universal need for Jesus. Trusting His sacrifice, submitting to His gospel, and being baptized into His body are the only way into salvation and grace (Romans 5:2; Hebrews 5:9; Galatians 3:27). Each urgently needs his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

“I AM WAITING FOR OTHERS. WHEN THEY GO, I WILL TOO.”

Some are only almost persuaded because they want a spouse, friend, child, or parent to commit to Christ first. Granted, Christianity is best when shared by a family and among close friends. Yet someone must go first. And one may have to go alone. Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me
NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Events:
1. Song Leading Class: Will meet at 4:30 PM.
2. Fellowship Meal: March 26th after AM worship. Last names M-Z have setup & clean-up.

Welcome!: We are happy to announce that Nicklas, Chanel, & Ascher Smith have expressed their desire to be counted among the laborers here at DeGaulle Drive. Please meet & welcome them.

Address: 105 Westchester Pl., NOLA 70131 Phone: 504-451-4836

Updated info: Sister Carol Byes new phone number is (504)300-5196.

Rejoice!: We rejoice that Sandy Jones was able to be with us last week! We further rejoice in her soft heart & her desire to share with the congregation her recent repentance unto God!

Work Night for the Master: February’s work night produced 354 local mailings, 21 cards of encouragement, & 1 World Bible School study.

NEEDING CARE & PRAYERS

Our Members & Visitors
Mary Cullum: Will be transferred from Bunkie, LA, to Ochsner East Bank on Jefferson Highway. Doctors are still treating Mary’s pneumonia & working to stabilize other medications. Her room number is not yet available.
Sandy Jones: Continues improving physically after being released from West Jeff on February 1st. She & her family request continued prayers for the days & weeks to come.
Chantelle Arabie
John Cullum
Sandy Jones
Paula Landis
Lorraine Stephen
Bill Burchett
Yvette James
The Landis Family
James Lieteau

Our Shut-In
Elwanda Piskorik

Our Family & Friends
Michelle, Tristin, & Cody Brumbaugh: A Christian family near Hattiesburg whose home was destroyed in the recent tornado in the area. All family members are safe.
Vauchelle DeArmas: Is being deployed to Kuwait on May 11th.
Karen Johnson: Neighbor & friend of the Cains; currently undergoing chemotherapy after having surgery to remove a growth in December.
Benjamin Macaluso: Underwent surgery as doctors work to determine & prevent his severe acid reflux. He is having a difficult recovery.
Family of Audrey Watson: Aunt of Voncile Lieteau; passed away last week.
Kaiyah Alexander
Keara Green & Family
Family of Janice Long
Yvette Milazzo
Family of Mike Burchett
Keith Kreppein
Sandra Martin
Adam Rose

Please submit all prayer requests in writing to Scott or Melissa Cain. Please supply regular updates on each individual in order to keep our prayer list up-to-date. For the sake of space, any name (except for shut-ins) will be removed after four weeks unless a new update is received. Thank you for helping us all to stay informed of the spiritual & physical needs of our members, friends, & family.

LAST WEEK’S RECORD

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Bible Reading

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PRIVILEGED TO SERVE

This Week

February 26

Sunday AM
Welcome: Howard Goodale
Prayer: Paul Macaluso (2)
Song Lead: Howard Goodale
Communion Scripture: Wes Arabie
Lord’s Table: Ron Landis
Sermon: Scott Cain
Dismissal: Roland Keith

Sunday PM
Welcome: Howard Goodale
Prayer: Don Robinson
Song Lead: Wes Arabie
Lord’s Table: Ron Landis
Sermon: Readings: Mk. 11-12
Dismissal: Ron Landis

Next Week

March 5

Sunday AM
Welcome: Wes Arabie
Prayer: Ron Landis
Song Lead: Howard Goodale
Communion Scripture: Paul Macaluso (2)
Lord’s Table: Paul Macaluso (2)
Sermon: Keith Cooper
Dismissal: Lee Roland
is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). It is in the best interest of your family for you to obey God now (2 Corinthians 6:2). Your example will help them (1 Corinthians 7:16).

There are life responsibilities that must be personally met. “Every man shall bear his own burden” (Galatians 6:5). No one can be educated or tested for you; no one can exercise for you; no one can be vaccinated for you; no one can rest, eat, or breathe for you; no one can cast your vote. No one can die for you, and, certainly, no one can face God for you. Each will be judged according to his own deeds done in his own body (Romans 14:10–12). God grants each the power of choice (Joshua 24:15), and He does not allow transferring. Remember, not to make a choice is a choice.

“I DON’T KNOW ENOUGH YET. I’LL STUDY A LITTLE MORE.”
If one delays because he does not know everything, he reverses Jesus’ command: learn, be baptized, then learn more (Matthew 28:19–20). If we wait until we know it all, then we will never obey.

Facts do not change after reflection. The Bible either is or isn’t true. God either loves me or He doesn’t. Jesus either is or isn’t God’s Son. He either died, was buried, and came alive on the third day, or He did not. Baptism either is or isn’t necessary. The facts do not change if I delay, although time may erase them from my mind.

Those on Pentecost heard only one lesson before becoming Christians (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian treasurer had one study before his decision (Acts 8). In fact, every example in Acts—Lydia, the jailer, Cornelius, Simon, the Corinthians, Saul—became Christians as soon as they were told what to do. If we do what they did, would we be wrong?

“LOOK AT ALL THE HYPOCRITES. WHY SHOULD I IDENTIFY WITH THEM?”
If one were rushing to a hospital during a heart attack or after a stroke, would he refuse to take a highway where two cars had wrecked on the ramp, another farther down had stopped with a flat, and still another was being towed with a stalled engine? Why reject the road to heaven (Matthew 7:13) because some people on it have broken down?

Louis Pasteur discovered immunization and practiced vaccination at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1885, he showed in some cases he could prevent rabies from developing after a bite. That year, a strange looking group traveled from Russia to Paris. They refused to be sidetracked. If any stopped them, they repeated a one-word mantra: “Pasteur, Pasteur, Pasteur.” The reason for their rush? They had been bitten by a rabid animal. When they learned a man in Paris might save them, they rushed to him. Were there hypocrites in Paris at the time? Were there snake-oil doctors peddling remedies that did not work? Probably. But how foolish it would have been to let this deter them from finding the man who could help them.

One seeking salvation is on a march to Jesus (John 12:21). He is the only one with a sin vaccine. Christians might disappoint us; Christ never will. When one rejects the gospel, he is not rejecting the hypocrites, but Jesus Himself (1 Samuel 8:7; Luke 7:29–30). Each finds in Him, as Pilate said, “no fault at all” (John 18:38).

“I AM AFRAID I COULDN’T HOLD OUT. I JUST CAN’T LIVE UP TO THE GOSPEL’S STANDARDS.”
It is important to count the cost before following Christ (Luke 9:23; 14:28). It is a lifelong commitment; it will require lifestyle changes; it leads to persecution.

Still, one should never doubt his ability to hold out. It is not a matter of Christians holding on to God; it is a matter of God holding on to Christians. We are safely in His hand (John 10:28–30). He is able to save to the “uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25; 2 Timothy 1:12). Thankfully, God does not expect His children to be perfect—if He did, no one would make it (1 John 1:8–10; 2:1–2). Each has sinful habits to overcome and much to learn about right living, but if the Corinthians could overcome their past (1 Corinthians 6:9–11), then with God’s help and longsuffering, we certainly can (Philippians 4:13).

“I’M GOING TO SOMEDAY; I JUST DON’T WANT TO RIGHT NOW.”
Felix once planned for a “convenient season” that (so far as we know) never came (Acts 24:25). History records that he lived a sinful life and was brought before the emperor on corruption charges. The Athenians said, “We will hear thee again of this matter” (Acts 17:32), but no record exists that they obeyed Christ later. Agrippa was almost persuaded, yet he turned away (Acts 26:26–29). Each would never again be as near to God as when he decided to wait.

Are you at salvation’s door? Are you almost persuaded? Have you said, “Some other day, some other time”? Someday is not on a calendar; sometime is not on a clock.

God is holding open the door for you. Come on in.