

Week 39—The Difference One Moment Can Make

Read

Adapted from a sermon by Hyman J. Appelman:

I had a friend in seminary...One day as he and I drove to our churches in Oklahoma, he told me of his conversion. He told how he was almost driven away from home because of his drunkenness, how he was kicked out of a Christian school in Mississippi, how he became a traveling salesman, how he went from bad to worse.

Then he told me of a night in a hotel room in Vicksburg, Mississippi, recovering from an awful bout of delirium tremens after a terrible period of drunken debauchery. He made up his mind then and there that there was but one more thing for him to do—commit suicide. Starting towards the Vicksburg bridge across the Mississippi, he walked up on the bridge and stood leaning over the railing watching the swelling, dark, muddy waters of the father of rivers.

Reaching into his pocket and taking out his package of cigarettes, he put one in his mouth but couldn't find a match. Perhaps he did not have any or was too hazy to find it.

A man came along. This young fellow of my story stopped him to ask, "Mister, do you have a match?"

"Yes," said the stranger, and gave him a box of matches.

Scratching the match with trembling hands, he tried to light his cigarette. One after another, match after match went out. Finally he succeeded in lighting the cigarette.

The stranger was carefully watching him. After awhile he said to him, "You look kind of sick. Are you?"

"Well, I have been."

"Let's go have a cup of coffee."

Something about the stranger appealed to the man in question. "All right, let's go." In his mind he said to himself, *I can commit suicide anytime.*

After the coffee, the stranger would not let this young fellow go. "Come with me."

"Where?"

"Never mind, just come along. Come on. You can go home after we're through."

They went to church. A revival meeting was going on. The two of them sat in the very back. Somehow, to the befuddled brain of the man in question, there came the story once again of the love of God, of the death of Christ on the cross. Apparently he was impressed, but he made no move.

He went back to his room. He stayed a few more days in Vicksburg to straighten out; then he went home. His people did not seem too glad to receive him.

On Sunday he went to church without saying a word to them. When the preacher gave the invitation, this young fellow walked slowly down the aisle, made a public profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then followed the Son of God in baptism. Later the Lord called him to preach, he entered the ministry, became an outstanding religious leader in the United States, leading many people to Christ.

But what if that anonymous stranger on the street had been too busy to notice him? What if he had condemned him for smoking instead of presenting the love of Christ? What if he had not been prepared to give of himself to another? Then this young man, whose name is Charlie, would have died without Christ and would have found himself

forever separated from God in the torments of hell. It's amazing the difference one life can make, the change that one moment on a bridge can bring. The stranger could have passed on by, but instead he stopped. You have the same choice: Are you ready to stop and speak of Christ or will you pass on your way without a second glance? ¹

Reflect

*Conduct yourself with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of every opportunity.
(Colossians 4:5)*

Respond

Write your thoughts here:

Prayer Requests for yourself, your students, and others with whom you serve in ministry:

Remember

How shall I feel at the day of judgment, if multitudes of missed opportunities pass before me in full review, and all my excuses prove to be disguises of my cowardice and pride? ²

–W. E. Sangster

NOTE: Dr. Hyman Appelman, from whom the above story was adapted, was born in Russia and was reared and trained in the Jewish faith. After becoming a lawyer he accepted Christ at age 28 in 1925. His Jewish family, then living in Chicago, disowned him. His father said to him, “*When your sides come together from hunger and you come crawling to my door, I will throw you a crust of bread as I would any other dog.*” Nevertheless, this Jewish Christian made eight or nine trips around the world as an evangelist, authored 40 books, and preached so intensively that he spent only two weeks a year at home. His ministry lasted 53 years.³

¹Hyman J. Appelman, “Paralyzed People,” [July 1946], Hudson, Curtis, ed. *Great Preaching on Soul Winning*, (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1989), p. 128-129.

²Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990), 68.

³Hyman J. Appelman, “Paralyzed People,” [July 1946], Hudson, Curtis, ed. *Great Preaching on Soul Winning*, (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1989), p. 128-129.