

A WINNING INTERCEPTION

Sermon, February 4, 2018

Texts: Proverbs 24:30-34, Isaiah 40:21-31 (I Corinthians 9:24-27)

Sports fans here may have seen the sermon title and, knowing today is Super Bowl Sunday, thought about another Super Bowl, number 49: New England Patriots vs. Seattle Seahawks, February 1, 2015. At Super Bowl 49 it had been three years since New England's last trip to the Super Bowl, and ten years since they won the Super Bowl in 2005 (*against, ahem, the Philadelphia Eagles, 24-21*). Two minutes left in the game, New England had a 28-24 lead and the Seattle Seahawks then drove to a first and goal on the 5-yard line. Seahawk Marshawn Lynch gained four yards on the very next play, stopped short of the end zone by Dont'a Hightower. 26 seconds left, Seattle attempted a quick pass to wide receiver Ricardo Lockett; Patriot rookie Malcolm Butler read it perfectly and made the biggest interception of his life, and probably the biggest one in Super Bowl history. Final score: New England Patriots 28, Seattle Seahawks 24 after one of the wildest finishes in Super Bowl history.

But this sermon isn't about THAT winning interception!

The "winning interception" I'm about to address is mentioned in the book *Leadership is an Art*.¹ Author and business consultant Max De Pree (*who passed away last August at his home in Holland, MI; he was a long-time businessman as well as a member of the Board of Trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary in CA*) wrote that one of the biggest challenges of anyone who would excel is "the interception of entropy." **That's** the winning interception in the game of leadership, that's the winning interception in the game of life. What is entropy? The precise definition is full of complicated terminology from the world of physics, but colloquially speaking, entropy is a term from physics that has something to do with the second law of thermodynamics; that the universe is winding down. Everything when left on its own — when not given attention and energy — has a tendency to deteriorate. That's the way it works in the universe; that's the way it works in business, that's the way it works in life. Everything when left on its own, when not given attention and energy, has a tendency to deteriorate. When we become apathetic or complacent or settle for the path of least resistance or forever procrastinate in some area of life ... in short, when we miss making this winning interception ... entropy entropy sets in and dreams die and hopes fade. Then a terrible thing happens: we get used to it. We learn to live with mediocrity.

Every day we have to be on the lookout for entropy. Though things might have been okay yesterday, that doesn't mean they stay okay forever. Put any important area of our lives on autopilot ... your relationships, your finances, your home maintenance, your health ... and risk entropy that is both subtle and destructive. Václav Havel, the tenth and last President of Czechoslovakia and the first President of the free Czech Republic 1993 to 2003, wrote, "*Just as entropy is the basic law of the universe, so it is the basic law of life to struggle against entropy.*" Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, Russian playwright and physician (*not the junior helmsman of the starship Enterprise*) wrote, "*The only thing that comes easy in life is entropy.*" Entropy starts with the failure to comprehend and appreciate and exercise and pay attention to what we have. It must be intercepted.

The Book of Proverbs indirectly, but frequently, addresses this winning interception. Proverbs 24:30–34. "*I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw ...* The writer of Proverbs says "I was going past a vineyard, and it was a mess. There were thorns all over the place, the grounds were covered with weeds, and the walls were falling down." To understand something of the "angst" behind this proverb, we have to appreciate that in the arid Middle East, a piece of land capable of growing crops was one of the most valuable things anyone could have. To be the owner of a vineyard was to be blessed, blessed with the opportunity of a lifetime. Again, entropy starts with the failure to comprehend and appreciate and cultivate what we have. To fail to comprehend that we have a gift, to fail to comprehend that our gift can be a source of blessing to ourselves and to others, to fail to take every opportunity to exercise and use and develop and cultivate what we've been given ... and entropy sinks in. Things deteriorate and fall apart.

¹ DePree, Max *Leadership is an Art*, c. 1967; see <https://www.leadershipnow.com/leadership/0324-8excerpt.html>. Also, insights and phrasing of the first half of this message were gleaned from <http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2008/july/interceptingentropy.html>

Now, all of us have a "vineyard." You got your body, your mind, your will, and some relationships with room to grow. You may have financial resources and the chance to do some good work. Everybody gets a vineyard, and that vineyard is ours to cultivate or neglect as we will. We don't even have to care for it all on our own! God promises to partner with us; in fact, He delights in doing so! But God never forces anybody to take action and care for their vineyard. The writer of this Proverb says, "*I was walking past a vineyard, and I thought of what it might have been.*" He sees that the vineyard could have been a thing of beauty. It could have been a source of pride, joy, and income to the owner. It could have been a source of blessing and pleasure to everybody around it, because a place that grows things people can eat and drink and enjoy is a blessing to everybody. But *this* vineyard wasn't any of those things. It fell short, tragically short, of what it might have been. Rather than being a blessing to that community, it became an eyesore; a weedy, unkempt, inhospitable place which probably only produced thorns and sour grapes, because the owner failed time and again to intercept entropy.

That brings us to our Super Bowl Sunday reading from Isaiah: I think the prophet is intimating in so many words, "*Just wait upon the Lord, and he'll give you strength to make the winning interception!*" When we looked at Isaiah 40 last time, I pointed out how I much prefer the KJV translation that reads "... *wait upon the Lord,*" rather than our pew Bible's translation of "... *hope in the Lord.*" I usually prefer the NIV translation in just about all other areas, but I really don't know where this particular translation "hope" comes from.

*(I edited this portion out due to time constraints, but include it here -- There is another Hebrew word which can be translated "wait expectantly" or "hope;" that is the Hebrew root word "yachal" ... but that's not the word used here. The literal definition of the Hebrew root "qavah" that is being used here in the original text is "to bind together, to twist together." Think of a rope, or a braid. The process of making a braid or a rope involves twisting or weaving (binding) strands together to form a stronger bond. It's imagery I frequently use at weddings, when two people are uniting their lives to form a marital bond. In a Christian marriage it takes three to give that marital bond real and lasting and cohesive strength. Like the braid of a young girl's hair, it appears there are two visible strands interwoven together, but we all know there is a third, "invisible" strand interwoven with the other two. Without that third strand, the braid can easily come unraveled. Marriage needs to have a Divine center, something, some ONE, greater and stronger holding the two together. I always implore the couple to weave their lives around Jesus, to make certain to honor Him in all they do, to make certain our Lord is at the center of their marriage, and to make certain He is always a welcome guest in their home ... for without that third strand, the braid of marriage can easily suffer entropy and come unraveled. I think Isaiah is making the same point ... those who "qavah" the Lord, those who bind themselves to the Lord by weaving every aspect of their lives around Him, those are the ones who gain new strength. The more we weave our lives and all aspects of our lives in relationship with God, the more strength and vitality He gives. And how do we do that? Well, by active and intentional **waiting upon the Lord.** – end of excerpt)*

I like to think of "waiting upon" in terms of a waiter at a restaurant. In this sense, to wait upon someone is to actively engage with and serve that person! A good waiter gives his or her customer excellent care and attention by checking in often, learning their desires, attending to them, engaging them, serving them. Waiters are not idly sitting by, they are active ... clearing and setting tables, running back and forth to the kitchen, dealing with chefs, memorizing menus, dealing with finicky customers (*and often multiple finicky customers*) and so on. "*Waiting upon*" implies action, it implies working and engaged and proactive attentiveness to the desires and wishes of the one being waited upon! It is not the "*sitting around hoping*" kind of waiting. Isaiah is talking about activity! With active words in this verse like "soaring" and "run" and "walk", and with the end result of the waiting being "gaining new strength", which you don't get by sitting around letting others serve you! Again, the Hebrew word used here signifies a proactive kind of waiting.

A mark of Christian maturity is when we realize God is not our celestial Waiter awaiting our beck and call to serve us, but that we are called to be the waiters, attentively awaiting His beck and call to serve Him! This is how we renew and gain new strength. This is how we rise up to loftier heights with wings like eagles (*and, in the words of a song you might hear often tonight, "Fly, Eagles, fly!"*) This is how we run through life and not get weary. This is how we may walk through adversity without fainting. This is how we may intercept entropy. Classic Christianity has always been about God endowing His people with good gifts, and God delighting in seeing His people use and enjoy and exercise and grow their gifts ... as they wait upon Him.

Where might God be calling you intercept entropy in the Super Bowl of your life? Let me encourage you to wait upon the Lord, be attentive to what He may be calling you to do, then make the winning interception.