

Worst to First

Life Lessons from the 2009 Kentucky Derby

- by, Joel Francis, Th.M. © 2009

50-1 longshot. Off the radar. No chance.

“Mine That Bird” made sports history going from having no chance to champion of the '09 Kentucky Derby. TV cameras left him off their lenses as he trailed behind all other horses.

Just prior to the last turn, jockey Calvin Borel let his horse loose in a breathtaking run for the roses. Slicing through tight traffic, clinging to the rail, Mine That Bird made running in mud look like floating on air.

He won by 6 3/4 lengths.

Near the finish, the improbable win left the TV commentator sputtering for words, trying to come up with the champion's name.

Mine That Bird's story exemplifies something often played out in life: **Going from worst to first.** Many times in my life things seemed impossible, but God made a way.

In junior high, I attended a neighboring district's basketball camp. Most of the drills were different than other camps. I once made a wrong pivot and a ball hit me in the back. Everybody laughed in mockery at the new kid. Yet, by the end of camp I became a finalist for the skills competition. Prior to the final round, the coaches had all the players predict the winner: The supporters of my opponent stood next to him and those predicting I'd win stood next to me. Of the many players, only a few came to my side. But, I won the duel. My small “fan club” was ecstatic! The others' mocking turned into silence.

Our journeys illustrate going from worst to first. “Worst” for all of us is that we were born in sin and separated from God. By putting our trust in Christ and receiving His forgiveness for our sin, we are saved by His grace through faith. We go from worst to first, as our identity is found by joining God's family (Eph. 2:19).

Once near Galilee, Jesus' disciples entered into a heated exchange. Ironically, they all had committed to follow Christ yet bantered with each other over who held the title, “Greatest.” When Jesus asked what they argued over, they went silent. Regardless, Jesus made the point, *“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all”* (Mark 9:35).

Very Last + Servant of All = First (greatness). God's math doesn't always equate with ours.

Joseph's life in Genesis doesn't compute very well: Sold into slavery, falsely imprisoned, and then catapulted to leadership over a powerful nation. Moses goes from hiding in a basket as a baby to leading Israel's massive exodus. Joshua and Caleb go from alienation by the majority to beneficiaries of their great faith. Ruth goes from gleaning leftovers to the wife of an influential landowner. Jesus went from a rejected outsider to resurrected Savior of the world. Worst to first permeates the Scriptures.

In today's world, believers in Christ are being rejected, ridiculed, and considered the "worst" as never before. More Christians were killed for their faith in the past 200 years than all previous centuries. But, record numbers have come to faith in the past two centuries. Escalating tensions continue to mount.

For decades, influential universities and other entities have embedded lies in the minds of students and society that evangelical Christians are to fault for the world's major problems. One agenda these "learned" leaders push is that God instructing Adam and Eve to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28), is why Christ-followers, especially in America, are to blame for issues such as pollution and a perceived "overpopulation" problem.

Yet, Gen. 1:28 is misinterpreted by those with a pretense of biblical scholarship. The truth is that God cares about His creation. God's people from the Old Testament era to today's missionaries (medical, etc.), have done more to help transform unsanitary, polluted areas than others. I've been overseas enough to know first-hand it's unjust to attack believers. For centuries, the most polluted regions of the world have been distinctly *non-Christian*.

It is also false perception that the world is "overpopulated." The issues are with leaders rejecting Christ and mismanaging His resources. Greed, a zeal for selfish gain, and other factors result in most countries having a few leaders living in luxury, while the rest are predominantly trapped in crowded slums.

The mass media to comedians are increasingly mocking followers of Christ, labeling us as the "worst" influence on the planet. Lost people falsely accused Jesus of demon-possession, (Jn. 8:48-49), and Paul of insanity (Acts 26:24), so too we should expect unjust, jealous attacks.

While we run our race (Heb. 12:1-2), the temporary pain of the world's muddy persecution hurled in our direction is minimal compared to the incredible future Christ is preparing (Jn. 14:1-4). Jesus winning over death's sting on the cross (1 Cor. 15:54-57) and His promise to come back on a war horse to destroy Satan's influence (Rev. 19:11-16) gives us confidence. Christ's promises provide hope that aren't gambles, not even 50-1. So may our enemy not mock us into silence or sadness, because *in Christ* we're not "worst" but first.