

Fortune or Frustration?

As the pilgrims approached the first anniversary of their arrival to the New World they could truly say it had been a rough year. That first brutal winter had claimed forty-five souls, almost half of their original number. They gladly welcomed their first spring with its warm weather and hope of a better year. Things did improve for the pilgrims as the year progressed. An English-speaking Indian by the name of Squanto befriended them; he served as an interpreter and taught them how to plant corn and live off the land. Things were looking up for the pilgrims. A bountiful harvest built up their stores enough to last them through the coming winter, or so they thought.

As the pilgrims marked their first full year in America, another ship showed up in the harbor. It was the Fortune, which came from England. The arrival of this ship was seen as an incredible boon. Surely this ship would live up to its name! It only took a day for the Plymouth leaders to realize that this celebration would be short lived. The Fortune had brought only one cargo—thirty-five people. These people brought no provisions, no tools, no clothing or bedding. It was immediately announced that all would have to go on half-rations through the coming winter. What the pilgrims first thought was a fortune on the Fortune turned into an incredible misfortune. That winter, supply levels got so low that each person was given five kernels of corn a day to live on!

The Fortune also brought on it a man who coerced the pilgrims into a contract that would saddle them with an incredibly unfair debt. It would take the pilgrims over twenty years to satisfy a debt in which they paid up to fifty percent interest at times. This ship, the Fortune, turned out to be a huge frustration.

I wonder how many times a pastor has seen a group of “travelers” coming to his church from another congregation and thought, “How fortunate!” Just to find out later that more people isn’t always better. Yes, they may bolster the tithing account and fill some vacant seats, but what did they bring with them? Many times these move-ins bring old problems and hang-ups; the same iniquities their previous pastors had to deal with. These people, who the glad pastor thought would be such great helps, end up stressing the resources of the church. They drag down services and take up the pastors time hindering the progress of God’s work. Many experienced pastor’s share this saying, “They move in and they move out.” When these people do leave, it usually is not alone. If they came in a group, they usually leave in a group even if it isn’t all at the same time. Though their departure may be spiritual progress the psychological effect on the pastor and the church can be quite damaging.

There are times of course when truly hungry people move in for truly sincere reasons. My parents had to make a move from one church to another and have been where they are now for thirty years. Sometimes it works but sometimes it brings nothing but frustration to a well-meaning pastor.

Dear pastor, next time a group wants to drop anchor in your church, you better think long and hard about what’s on that boat.

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