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THIS IS THE LAST TIME by Jim Burks

I have been warned by this phrase more than a few times. Nearly every time I took it seriously. No doubt, you did, too. It's a common phrase that basically means, IF IT HAPPENS AGAIN, FURTHER ACTION WILL BE NEEDED. It always seemed to me that further action, whatever it may be, would not be pleasant. So, 'this is the last time' amounted to a final warning.

I meant it that way, too, I think. Although I never really stopped to figure out WHAT action I was going to take. Usually the power of the phrase affected everyone the same way it did me. The thought of WHAT might come scared me, even though it wasn't actually the last time. I remember my Dad saying those words to me more than once without taking any real action. But, each time seemed like it was going to be THE last time. You don't keep score on something like this because this just may be the last time.

Now, I know every parent uses these words. As phrases go, it's right at the top of the list of scary things used on children. Sure, we might juggle the verbiage. We might say, "I don't want to say this again;" or, "How many times do I need to say this?" But, when all is said and done, it means THIS IS THE LAST TIME!

The many times I said this phrase to my children couldn't be counted. Yet, I've never been a threatening kind of father, I don't think. And, the opposite is true. I wasn't a particular lovey, kissy kind either. We had other ways to show affection as a family. I suppose you could say that we were more of a "everyone does his part, no questions asked" kind of family. Our affections were usually a pat on the shoulder, back or- in the baseball way of appreciation, a pat on the bottom. I remember yelling, "way to go" an awful lot. Of course, we hugged the girls, but then, not all that much.

SO, WHAT AM I GETTING AT? As many of you have heard, my son Justin has accepted the pastorate at Landmark Missionary Baptist Church in Palmdale, Ca. He will start preaching next Sunday for the Palmdale Church. Until his house sells and the family moves on the field, they will drive to Palmdale every weekend-a round trip of 13 hours.

At Trinity Church we have three preachers who take turns preaching on Sunday nights. Last Sunday night was Justin's time to bring the evening message. When I introduce him, reality startled me when I said, "this is the last time" we will hear from Justin."

Let me tell you folks, the phrase took on a whole new meaning. This is the last time meant my son is leaving us. His place and slot in the church would be no longer. Sunday was the last time His wife, Theresa and the three children will be with us on Sundays. Sure, there were tears.

But, even though it was the LAST TIME as Justin serves in a different area, it is not sorrowful. Partings, in the work of the Lord, are but a portion of an eternal whole in a believer's life. Anywhere within the whole is the work that God has for us. It's just another place. I think that parting contains a sweetness for us in the present here and now. Knowing that we shall be gathered again to our loved ones in the resurrection moves the heart to hunger for the taste of the kingdom of God. Yes, we not only expect our kids to serve God; we desire it for them.

When it comes to church work, the phrase THIS IS THE LAST TIME will always carry scary warnings. I think that's the way we should take it, especially in these last days. There is coming one LAST TIME when there will be no more warning. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly," Rev 22:7, 13, 10; and "suddenly, and find you asleep," Mk 13:36. Jesus places great emphasis on this matter, "Be on the alert!" He says in Mk 13:37.

For preachers, THIS IS THE LAST TIME means preach in every season. For many, another time to repent and receive Jesus is gone. And, for believers, “it is the last hour” “and many antichrist have risen,” I John 2:18. For God’s people, the urgency of the phrase shouldn’t be that the end catches us unprepared but rather, THIS IS THE LAST TIME should warn us and alert us to redeem what time we have left. After which, further action certainly will be taken.