

Read Colossians 1:1-8

Who here has ever heard the name Maurice Clarett? Maurice Clarett was a freshman at The Ohio State University in 2001 through 2002. But the reason that Maurice Clarett became known to so many was because he was the star running back on the Ohio State team that won the National Championship. Clarett scored the winning touchdown in the 2nd overtime to beat the University of Miami.

Clarett was a great running back and he knew it. He would sign autographs that year as “the greatest of all time.” He was a great player and he had an even greater ego. After the National Championship game, however, it was discovered that Clarett had been receiving illegal payments to play at Ohio State. He was suspended for improper payments and then misleading investigators.

Clarett then sued the NFL because he wanted to turn pro but NFL rules forbid a player from playing until he has been out of high school for 3 years. Clarett lost his suit and so he waited another year and was drafted in the 3rd round by the Denver Broncos. Clarett showed up in Denver with a real unpleasant attitude. He spent much of his time at wild parties and would show up at practice out of shape and suffering from hangovers. He was cut before the season started.

Later that year, Clarett was arrested on 2 counts of armed robbery. He said that sports and criminal activity were all that he cared about. He said Christ could have been next to him telling him what to do and he wouldn't have listened to him. Clarett was sentenced to 7 years in prison.

But while he was in prison, Clarett took anger management classes and began to write. He was released in 3 ½ years. This past Friday, Clarett completed the 8 game season with the Omaha Nighthawks, a team in the inaugural UFL professional football league.

Clarett's statistics this year were not very impressive. 15 rushes for 29 yards and play on specialty teams. But Clarett now volunteers regularly at the Boys and Girls Clubs in Omaha and has been a model teammate.

Maurice Clarett had the talent to be an NFL superstar. But now he is a 3rd string tailback in a minor league football league. What should his attitude be today? According to him, he says this, "In January I was in prison, and now I have completed a professional football season. I would absolutely say that I could never have thought of being at this place. It's a blessing from God, and I take it that way."

Many of us have regrets of things we have done in our past. Maybe some bad decisions were made which caused you to lose a lot of money. Maybe you entered into some destructive relationships. Maybe you did some things that have embarrassed your family. Maybe you participated in activities that caused someone a great deal of pain or hurt. Maybe there are some things you wished you would have done but you missed the opportunity.

We have all made some serious mistakes in our lives. And sometimes others have suffered due to our mistakes. But as Maurice Clarett reminds us, we can dwell on our mistakes in the past and wallow in them or we can learn from them and be thankful that we are alive today with new opportunities before us. We can seize those opportunities and grow and move forward with our life.

Today we can be thankful for another chance. A chance to lead a life of faithful obedience. It is not easy. It is extremely hard. But listen to these words from Paul about how we are live our life today.

Read Colossians 1: 9-14.

Today we will be invited to a table. This table has bread and juice that remind all of us that our mistakes are not the final word. The God we worship is a God of second chances. The God we worship forgives us and allows us to forgive ourselves. The God we worship did not condemn us for our mistakes. Instead of condemnation, we received sacrifice.

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, I pray that we remember to thank God for new opportunities. And after thanking God for those new opportunities, may we pray to God to show us how to bear good fruit. AMEN.

-Text: Colossians 1: 1-15

-Given: November 21, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)