

## Setback or Success?

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**M**arian Anderson was an opera singer with a voice “such as one hears once in 100 years,” noted the great conductor Arturo Toscanini. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution barred her from singing at Constitution Hall simply upon the basis that Miss Anderson was black. An alternative performance was arranged on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial where 75,000 heard her sing – instead of the 4,000 which would have been a capacity crowd at Constitution Hall.

Several things came to mind when reading this story. First, our preconceptions can cause us to overlook things of value and quality. It wasn’t that the DAR was unaware of Marian Anderson’s voice quality; she had debuted at Carnegie Hall in 1929 and in 1936 became the first black to perform at the White House. When our value system is different from God’s value system, we will inevitably miss some blessings that God has for us. This is Paul’s argument against sectarianism in 1 Cor 3:21-23.

Secondly, we must carefully assess the positions we take – especially the ones most strongly held – to see if we are on solid ground. The photo of George Wallace defiantly standing in the doorway of the University of Alabama is now an embarrassment, a symbol of all that is vile about racial bigotry. Paul reminded the Romans of their former acts “*of which you are now ashamed*” (Rom 6:21). There is nothing wrong with holding a firm position on a moral or doctrinal issue, but we must make sure that the basis of our conviction is **God’s** words and character rather than our own opinions. Opinions can change, leaving us looking rather foolish.

Two other observations come from Miss Anderson’s viewpoint. First, she refused to harbor a grudge against the DAR for its prejudice. “You lose a lot of time hating people,” she commented. Godly people cannot let the misguided attitudes of others drag them into the mire. God accused Moses of rebellion at the waters of Meribah, the *very charge* Moses had leveled against the Israelites when they angered him (Num 20:10, 24).

Finally, what first appeared to be a miserable defeat and humiliation for Marion Anderson turned into a resounding triumph. We don’t know where all the twists and turns of life will lead. How many times has God used the treachery of His enemies to bless His people? Ask Joseph. Ask Daniel. Ask the Jerusalem church. Ask *Jesus*. God can grant us success out of the greatest setbacks. We must keep our courage and wait for His vindication.