

## Saved by the Bell

In America, we hear a number of proverbs or wise sayings that have been handed down from generation to generation. Examples would include: "A stitch in time saves nine," "A watched pot never boils," and "Saved by the bell."

Many of these sayings have intriguing origins, and when we explore those sources, we learn some practical philosophy and important lessons.

Take "Saved by the bell." Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar did some research and learned that the line goes back in history to 1696 when a sentry by the name of John Hatfield was on duty at Windsor Castle in England. Sentry duty was taken seriously in those days and it basically meant staying alert.

Hatfield, however, was accused of sleeping at his post and neglecting his duty. He was given a trial at which he spoke in his own defense. He claimed that he had not been sleeping and had, in fact, heard the bell of St. Paul's Cathedral 20 miles away in London strike 13 times.

This was an unbelievable claim, and not accepted as a good defense. Hatfield was found guilty. In that day and time, sentries determined to be derelict of duty were sentenced to death on the gallows.

A kind or curious -- or perhaps both -- person thought enough of the unusual nature of Hatfield's story to make some inquiries about his unusual defense. This individual discovered that, indeed, the bell at St. Paul's Cathedral had struck 13 times. There were others in the community who had also heard and counted those 13 strikes. Hatfield received a reprieve and lived to the ripe old age of 102. He was, literally, "saved by the bell."

What conclusion can be drawn from this story? We should be careful about how we accuse or convict other people until all the evidence is in. Common sense and fair play demand nothing less.

--Beecher Hunter