

Sermons 2008

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Chapter 1. Opportunity Lost

Note: Preached on Palm Sunday, 2008

READ - *Luke 19:29-44*

TEXT - *because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Luke 19:44b)*

THEME - If we don't seize the opportunities the Lord gives us, we will lose those opportunities.

1.1. Introduction

In the days before modern harbors, a ship had to wait for the flood tide before it could make it to port. The term for this situation in Latin was *ob portu*, that is, a ship standing over off a port, waiting for the moment when it could ride the turn of the tide to harbor.

The English word *opportunity* is derived from this original meaning. The captain and the crew were ready and waiting for that one moment for they knew that if they missed it, they would have to wait for another tide to come in. Shakespeare turned this background of the exact meaning of *opportunity* into one of his most famous passages. It's from *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

(*Bits & Pieces*, March 2, 1995, pp. 16-17)

Let us ponder that word "opportunity," and especially the subject of "lost opportunities."

QUOTE - For all sad words of tongue and pen, The saddest are these, 'It might have been'. (John Greenleaf Whittier)

Our text this morning tells the story of an opportunity lost - Israel was presented with Jesus and given the opportunity to accept Him as their Messiah - their King, and they turned Him away. Opportunity lost!

Consider some examples of Opportunity Lost:

1.2. Opportunity Lost - to serve God

The Christian life is rife with opportunity to serve God. Jesus told the church at Philadelphia, *behold, I have set before thee an open door (Revelation 3:8)*. What a picture of the Christian life He sets before all of us! In so many ways He sets before us an open door or opportunity to serve Him:

1. Opportunity to use our spiritual gifts.

ILLUS - In Jesus' parable of the talents, told in *Matthew 25*, Jesus described a man who entrusted his servants with talents - 5 to one, 2 to another, and 1 to a third. The first two used their talents - invested them and made a profit. The third did nothing - hid his talent and returned it to his master unused at the conclusion of the scene. Jesus' description of the man's reaction is instructive:

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. (Matthew 25:26-27)

Many lessons, I'm sure, can be derived from this, but one is undeniable - the gifts the Lord has given you are to be used, and the time to use them is finite! The man in the parable lost his opportunity to invest his talent because he did not seize the opportunity when it was presented.

Are you using your spiritual gifts?

2. Opportunity to help others

Further on in that same chapter in *Matthew* we read Jesus' teaching on the judgement of the nations. Again there was a group with whom He was displeased - a group which had squandered an opportunity to serve Him by helping others:

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. (Matthew 25:44-45)

Are you helping others while there is still time to do so?

- When the opportunity to serve meals to the hungry comes up the first Saturday of every month here - where are you?

- When the opportunity to support the spread of the gospel with your money comes by you in the form of an offering plate each Sunday - how do you respond to that opportunity?
- When visitors come through the door of our church, and we hear Jesus whisper, "Here is an opportunity to attract a lost soul to Me," how do we view the opportunity? HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO US? Do we see it as an opportunity to be SEIZED, or let it slip through our fingers?

ILLUS - In his autobiography, *Just as I Am*, Billy Graham tells about a conversation he had with John F. Kennedy shortly after his election:

"On the way back to the Kennedy house, the president-elect stopped the car and turned to me. 'Do you believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?' he asked.

'I most certainly do.' 'Well, does my church believe it?'

'They have it in their creeds.'

'They don't preach it,' he said. 'They don't tell us much about it. I'd like to know what you think.'

I explained what the Bible said about Christ coming the first time, dying on the Cross, rising from the dead, and then promising that he would come back again. 'Only then,' I said, 'are we going to have permanent world peace.'

'Very interesting,' he said, looking away. 'We'll have to talk more about that someday.' And he drove on."

Several years later, the two met again, at the 1963 National Prayer Breakfast.

"I had the flu," Graham remembers. "After I gave my short talk, and he gave his, we walked out of the hotel to his car together, as was always our custom. At the curb, he turned to me.

'Billy, could you ride back to the White House with me? I'd like to see you for a minute.'

'Mr. President, I've got a fever,' I protested. 'Not only am I weak, but I don't want to give you this thing. Couldn't we wait and talk some other time?'

It was a cold, snowy day, and I was freezing as I stood there without my overcoat.

'Of course,' he said graciously."

But the two would never meet again. Later that year, Kennedy was shot dead. Graham comments, "His hesitation at the car door, and his request, haunt me still. What was on his mind? Should I have gone with him? It was an irrecoverable moment."

Every soul that walks through the doors of this church may never do so again - it is an opportunity to win them - an opportunity that may be seized or lost.

QUOTE - We missed him. Our chance to change things came and passed and we did not know it was there. A dark-skinned little boy sat through Sunday School classes for three years at a great Baptist Church (First Church, San Antonio) but someone missed him. His name was Sirhan Sirhan, and at age 24 he shot and killed Senator Robert Kennedy. In a welter of words and the shudder of grief throughout our nation, the persistent thought keeps recurring...someone missed him. (Dr. Jimmy Allen, former pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas in Pulpit Helps, May, 1991)

3. Opportunity to pray.

READ - *Matthew 26:40-41*

We have this amazing power in prayer. Are you using it while there is still time?

I believe with all my heart that our church will only be as strong as its prayer life. We meet every Wednesday evening for prayer. It doesn't take long, and all we do is pray together. Yet very few (sometimes none) attend.

Someday soon the opportunity to pray will be gone. May we seize it now while we still can!

4. Opportunity to meet with God's people.

READ - *John 20:19-24*

One of the great opportunities Christians (especially in America) have today - the local church. Are you meeting? Everytime you miss is a lost opportunity that can never be regained.

1.3. Opportunity Lost - for victory

READ - *2 Kings 13:14-19*

An interesting story - Joash was denied complete victory because he was half-hearted in his response - tepid and lukewarm and uncommitted in his obedience.

Sound familiar?

How many of us lose out on opportunities for victory in life because of our half-hearted Christianity?

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16)

That tells us what Christ thinks of lukewarm / half-hearted Christianity - makes Him sick!

We need to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into our walk with God. Wear ourselves out in service for Him. Be ON FIRE - HOT, not lukewarm.

There are a couple of ways to put out a fire - water is one. Dirt is another. Too many Christians keep heaping the dirt of sin on the fire of their faith and wonder where the fire went! If you want victory in life, get rid of the things that cool your walk with God!

QUOTE - "Whatever cools my affection for Christ is of the world." (John Wesley)

1.4. Opportunity Lost - to be saved.

(Review text)

ILLUS - Parable of the 10 virgins - 5 wise and 5 foolish, found in *Matthew 25:1f*. Have you considered the warning Jesus gave here? *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. (Matthew 25:10)*

Do you think you have forever to decide on Christ? The opportunity is limited, friend. You need to seize it before it is lost forever - before the door is shut!

ILLUS - People of Gadara - asked Him to depart out of their coasts... *And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. (Matthew 8:34)*

How many of them got their wish? How many of them watched Him depart and never come their way again? How many of them lost the opportunity for salvation FOREVER?

ILLUS - Bartimaeus (cf. *Mark 10:46-52*) - opposite approach - knew this might be his only chance (probably was - no record of Jesus passing by there again).

Opportunity for salvation is a LIMITED OPPORTUNITY. Once lost, that opportunity will never come again.

ILLUS - Felix - *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. (Acts 24:25)*

... behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

ILLUS - I was crossing the, Atlantic a short time ago, and one night I and some of the passengers were talking to the captain, when he told us of an incident that had occurred to him in that neighborhood some years previously. He was in command of a vessel, which had got thus far on her voyage, when the screw broke, and the engineer withdrew the shaft with the intention of repairing it; but the water rushed in through the hole, the bulkhead was not closed in time, and in a few minutes the ship began to sink. The boats were got out, the captain stepping into one laden to the gunwale. The night was dark, and the sea so rough that it seemed impossible for the boat to stay afloat. After a while, they saw the lights of an approaching steamer; but how could they signal it?

They made search in the boat, and found a battered lantern with an inch or two of candle in it. Then they tried to find a match. Every man felt in his pockets, but in vain. Not a match was to be found. The captain bade them search again, and at last, out of some corner, one match was produced. The man who found it handed it to the mate; the mate passed it to another officer, and he gave it to the captain. The sailors clustered round him, holding out their jackets to keep off the wind, and they watched him with anxiety. The captain said he had faced many a difficulty and danger, but had never felt such responsibility as at that moment when he had to strike the match, but he did it. The lantern was lighted, and when it was waved to and fro the ship saw the signal, altered its course, and picked them up.

Now, what gave such value to that match? It was the only one. Your life is your only one in this world. Misdirected, so as to cause your soul to be lost, you have no other in which to remedy the error. --Henry Drummond

The saddest words in the Bible are in *Jeremiah 8:20, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."*

1.5. Conclusion

What opportunities do you sense the Lord laying before you?

- Service?

Many things need done around here - is He speaking to you?

- Victory?

What are you struggling with in your life? And how much of that struggle is because you don't seize the opportunity for victory, and rely instead on a half-hearted, tepid Christianity?

- Salvation?

Are you saved? Are you sure? If not, how long halt ye between two opinions? Why not make up your mind? Today is the day, and tomorrow may not come?

May God help us to SEIZE opportunities before it is too late... before they become Opportunities Lost.

May we not be as Israel, who turned away their Messiah and King *because they knew not the time of their visitation.*