

INTRODUCTION

When you talk about time, the Bible uses two words for time. From the word *chronos* we get our word "chronology," which means sequential time, moment after moment after moment, but the word time in this passage in verse 16 is the word *kairos*, which means a specific, appropriate time and I think is best translated opportune time.

There was an old hillbilly farmer whose family's schedule operated around their faithful, old grandfather clock. Early one morning about 3:00 the clock began to chime the hour and it went bong, bong, bong and then something malfunctioned in the mechanism and it continued to chime and it chimed 18 times. The old farmer jumped up and said, "Wake up, kids. It's later than it's ever been before!" And to be sure, it is later than it's ever been before in history because history is "His-story." If you were to travel to Wheaton College, that Christian school in Illinois, there is a beautiful sundial in the middle of the campus and underneath the sundial are inscribed these words. "It is later than you think" and indeed it is! The Bible talks about the importance of making the most of every opportunity of redeeming the time. Let's see what Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:15-16. "Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

That word, opportunity, is an interesting word. Look at the center of the word PORT. It is a word that came from the time of sailing ships before powered ships and when a ship was sailing to a destination, it would often stop outside the harbor and weigh anchor, because the tide or the wind might not be right for them to enter the harbor. They had to wait until the tide or the wind was precisely right and then they would raise their sails and they would sail toward the "port," thus the word "opportunity." When the timing was right, they would move toward a goal. That's our word "opportunity." There are times in your life when you ought to do certain things and if you don't do them at that time, you miss the opportunity.

The ancient Greeks had a minor god named Opportunity. In fact, archaeologists have excavated a statue of this god. It's a very strange looking statue, because there are wings on its feet. On his forehead, he has a long forelock of hair, but in the back he is completely bald. Inscribed underneath this statue were a series of questions and answers:

What is your name? *My name is Opportunity.*

Why are there wings on your feet? *Because I pass quickly.*

Why do you have a long forelock? *That a man may grab me when he faces me.*

Why are you bald in the back? *Because no man can lay hold of me once I am past.*

That's so true of opportunity! The ancient philosopher said, "There are three things that can never be recalled: a spent arrow, a spoken word, and a lost opportunity." John Greenleaf Whittier wrote those words we've all heard: "Of all sad words of tongue and pen the saddest are these it might have been." We have all been the victims of missed opportunities, but there are some things in our lives that we need to make sure we don't miss the opportunity to take advantage of. I want to mention four this morning to make the very best use of your time.

I. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEND TIME WITH JESUS

Number one. Don't miss the opportunity to spend time with Jesus. I think one of the best ways you can invest your time is to spend quality time with Jesus. We use all of these sayings about time that really aren't true. People say, "I'm just killing time." You can't kill time; time will one day kill you. Somebody says, "I'm trying to buy some more time." You can't buy time. Or how about, "I'm losing time." You can't lose time—you can only spend time and you either spend it wisely or you spend it unwisely. "Time flies." That's true, but you are the pilot. You're the one who ought to be calling the shots on how you invest your time. So many people live by the pressures of their daily life instead of by the priorities that they set. If you are setting priorities, the number one priority of your daily life ought to be to spend quality time with Jesus Christ. You won't grow as a Christian you won't be blessed you won't be effective unless you spend quality time with Jesus.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is of Martha and Mary. Jesus came over to their house for supper one night and Martha was in the kitchen banging the pots and pans together while Mary was in the living room at the feet of the Lord Jesus looking up into his face and listening to him, fellowshiping with him, communing with him, getting to know Jesus better. Martha didn't like it one bit. I call her, "Old Meatloaf Martha" and that's not to criticize her. I thank God for every man and every woman in the body of Christ who are like Martha. They are the workers. They have the gift of service—but I do fault Martha on one thing and it's simply a matter of timing. Don't you think she should have been doing what she was doing a couple of hours earlier and had all of that ready so when Jesus came, she could spend a little time with him herself? But here she was in there banging the pots and pans together and I can just picture in my sanctified imagination, she walks to the kitchen door and she's behind the back of Jesus and she sort of signals to Mary. Mary just sits there, smiling up into the face of Jesus and not paying any attention to Martha. Finally, Martha gets so irate she stomps in there and says to Jesus, "Can't you do something about my sister?" By the way, how many times have you prayed a prayer like that for somebody in your family? "Can't you do something about my husband? My wife? My children?" and Jesus turns to Martha and says, "Wait a minute, Martha. Mary doesn't have the problem. You have the problem and it's the problem of how you are spending your time." In Luke 10, "Martha, Martha. You are worried and upset about many things." Does that describe your life? That's a profile of your life right there. "worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her." What Martha was doing was good but what Mary was doing was better.

You can spend all your time doing those good things in life so that you neglect the best or the better and in that case the good becomes the enemy of the best and Jesus said, "The one thing every day that is needed and necessary for you is to spend quality time with Jesus." I'm talking about, as I have mentioned so many times before, a daily quiet time with Jesus where you get up and you open the Bible and you pray and you write in a prayer journal perhaps you are just spending time where you are totally devoted to Jesus. That's private. That's the reason you come to church on Sundays because here you are you are gathered and the whole reason you are here is to worship God to get to know Jesus better to hear from him to speak to him and this is good time you are spending right now, but you need to do it every day privately or even better with

your family. I know what some of you are saying. "I just don't have time to do that." You have just as much time as anybody else on earth. It may be that you are not investing your time wisely. Somebody said time is something like a suitcase. Some people can get more in a suitcase than others, and if you gave everybody the same size suitcase, they are going to fit different amounts of articles in there. Time is the same way. God gives everybody the same amount of time it's a matter of how you pack time in that suitcase.

What would you do if every night at midnight someone deposited \$1,440 into your bank account with the stipulation that you had to spend it all in 24 hours or it would be gone? Wouldn't you enjoy that? Sure! I imagine you would make sure that every day you spent all \$1,440. The truth is better and it is this: Every day God deposits 1,440 minutes into your life and you have to spend them wisely or you will lose them. People say, "Time is money." oh, no time is much more valuable than money. When Louis IV, King of France, lay on his deathbed, he said, "I will give half my kingdom for one more hour to live!" but he didn't have enough money. You can't buy time. You can only spend it wisely. So, it's a matter of priorities and Jesus always has time for you do you have time to spend with him every day? You need to make time!

II. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE JESUS IN YOUR CHURCH

The second opportunity that you don't dare miss is don't miss the opportunity to serve Jesus in your church. You say, "I thought you said Martha was doing it wrong." No, I just said she *timed* it wrong. I think only after you have spent quality, intimate time with Jesus are you prepared to serve him. The very best way you can spend your time after you come out of that quiet time with Jesus is to serve him in some area of ministry in your church. I just want to say a brief, loving word to all regular attenders of our church, and you are not a member of Green Acres Baptist Church. You may often ask yourself, "What's the use? Why should I even join the church? I am coming. I get to sing the songs I get to hear the messages I get to fellowship I do everything that a member does" ...except one thing—you don't serve. That's the advantage of joining a church, being a member of a church, because to teach Sunday School, to serve on our ministry teams, to serve in areas of responsibility you need to be a member of Green Acres Baptist Church. It doesn't make you any more righteous any more holy. It doesn't get you preferential treatment in heaven but, that's the reason you join a church because when you join a church, you are basically saying, "I want to serve the Lord through my church." It's the difference between being a spectator and being a participant. You serve the Lord.

How are you spending your time? If you were to do a personal time study, writing down how you spend time during a week this is how many hours I sleep; this is how many hours I work; this is how many hours I eat; this is how much time I spend in recreation; where would serving the Lord fall on that continuum? The average American spends 25 hours a week watching television. You say, "Not me I don't watch nearly that much." Believe me, there are several over there who watch much more than that, who raise the average to 25 hours. By the time you are 50 years old the average American has watched 65,000 hours of television—that's 6 years of your life! If you spend only two hours a week serving the Lord by age 50, that means about 7,000 hours invested in serving the Lord.

Is what you are doing really mattering for eternity? Is the way you are spending going to matter

1,000 years from now? I'll never forget that sign I used to pass on the highway in south Alabama that said: "Life is short. It will not last, only what's done for Christ will last!" What you do for Jesus Christ will count in eternity, but a lot of the things we spend our time doing won't matter 1,000 years from now. A lot of what you are doing may be like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It's something to do, but it is useless. It's like dusting the furniture while the house is on fire. It gives you something to do, but it's meaningless. But what you do for Jesus Christ will truly count for all eternity. Are you serving the Lord in your church?

Look at what the Bible says in Ephesians 6:7. "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." Are you investing your time wisely? Some people are so concerned about being efficient they want to be efficient, but they are not effective. The difference between being efficient and being effective is being efficient means you are doing things right; being effective means you are doing the right thing. You can be so efficient in what you are doing but it is not the right thing to do. Americans are faster and busier and louder than ever before! You and I are living in a technological revolution where everything is improved where we can do things faster but, all we are doing is making more noise, and we are not really using the time we have saved wisely.

That's like the four guys who were always trying to outdo each other with their technology. They were playing golf and standing on the putting green one day and one guy was putting and suddenly his putter began to ring like a telephone. He unscrewed the top of his putter and pulled out a tiny cellular phone. He talked on it and then screwed it back in. He looked at his partners and said, "That's pretty neat, isn't it?" They weren't impressed. The second guy said, "That's nothing! I've had microchips implanted in my little finger and my thumb and if I just touch them together, I can talk on the phone like that. That's pretty neat, isn't it?" They weren't impressed. The third guy said, "That's nothing! I've had a microchip implanted in my tooth and all I have to do is touch it with my tongue and I can activate it and talk on the cellular telephone with my hands free. That's pretty neat, isn't it?" They weren't impressed. The fourth guy didn't say anything. He was just over there putting. In a few moments the fourth guy started snorting and making a funny noise with his mouth and they said, "What's wrong with you?" He said, "Wait a minute I have a fax coming in." We have all of these time-saving gadgets. We're farther along with technology than we have ever been before, but spiritually and morally where are we? What ever happened to you spending that quiet time alone with the Lord serving God? Don't miss the opportunity to spend time with God. Don't miss the opportunity to serve Jesus.

III. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE JESUS WITH A FRIEND

Number three. Don't miss the opportunity to share Jesus with a friend. Do you remember our picture of Opportunity? I believe there are times when it may be inopportune for you to share the gospel. You say, "When?" It may be a time when it is just not appropriate but most of the time it is. What you need to look for is when is the *opportune* time. When is the wind right, the tide right when are the circumstances right that I can share Jesus with my friend? I believe it's safe to say that everybody in this room knows some people who as far as we know are not Christians. There are certain opportunities God gives us to share the gospel with them. How many times do we miss that opportunity? And it will never come back exactly like that again.

Charles Carter is pastor of the Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama and a friend of mine whom I respect. When he was a student at Samford University, there was a fraternity brother of his who was not a Christian, who gave no evidence of being a Christian and God burdened Charles' heart about him. So Charles said, "I'm going to share with that guy about Jesus." He had it all planned. He was going to invite his friend to play tennis he was going to take his pocket New Testament and a gospel tract and he was going to tell him how to accept Jesus after they had played tennis. They got to playing tennis and Charles is a competitive guy, and he really got more into the tennis match than for the real reason that he had invited his friend to play. They were playing one point and they volleyed up to the net and after the point was over, Charles bent down to pick up the tennis ball and the New Testament and the tract fell out of his pocket onto the tennis court. His friend right across the net said, "Charles, what is that?" You talk about opportunity! Charles said, "Oh, it's nothing." and stuffed it back into his pocket and they got back into the tennis match. He lost and was a little bit upset because he lost the tennis match so, he just thought, "I'll just wait until another time to tell him about the Lord." You can imagine Charles Carter's horror when the next morning he read that his friend had been killed in a car wreck the night before. I've heard Charles tell that story and it still bothers him. I can just imagine. We have all missed opportunities to share the gospel with somebody because we thought we would have another opportunity!

That's why the Bible says to make the most of every opportunity. Look at what the Bible says in Proverbs 11:30. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." We are talking about walking wisely. I don't know anything better you can do with your time anything than to spend time with Jesus to serve Jesus and to share Jesus with a friend.

IV. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE SAVED!

I've been talking to Christians, but I have one final word I want to say to those of you who may be here today and you are not a Christian as far as you know. You may be a religious person and you believe in God, but if it came right down to it, you don't know for certain you are going to heaven when you die. Number four, don't you dare miss the opportunity to be saved! Don't miss the opportunity to be saved! There is a passage in Isaiah that is both encouraging and scary at the same time. Isaiah 55:6. It says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." The encouraging part of that is that the Lord can be found and the Lord is near, but the scary part of that verse is that it implies there is a time when he may not be found and there is a time when he won't be near. There is an opportune time for you to call upon the Lord to be saved and there is a time when that opportunity may be gone. It's like a "limited offer." You say, "Wait a minute. I attend church I believe in God but I'm not a Christian. I'm not one of those born-again Christians like you people talk about but, I think probably one of these days I'll do that." Why are you waiting? The opportunity could pass for you to be saved! You say, "Don't talk to me like that! I know I'm not going to die anytime soon." Do you know for sure? You say, "I'm healthy." More people die with their shoes on than die in a hospital bed. I'm not trying to scare you I'm just trying to be honest with you. God does not promise you tomorrow, but he does promise you the offer of eternal life today if you'll receive him.

When were you the closest to death in your life? Some of you are thinking, "When I had that surgery" or "When I had that heart attack" or "When I was in that accident." Oh, no. The time

you were the closest to death is right now! You survived the wreck; you survived the surgery; you survived the heart attack; and this moment you are closer to death than you have ever been before, so you could die. The opportunity could pass for you to accept Christ. Do you know what else could happen? Jesus could come back. He could come back at any moment and when Jesus comes back, he's going to take the church, the body of Christ, home as his bride and there won't be a Christian left to tell you how to be saved. So you could miss that opportunity. By no fault of your own Jesus could come back! Do you know what else could happen? You could lose the mental capacity to respond to a gospel invitation. Let me explain.

In my former church, there was a young man I met who was getting married to a lady in our congregation. As I was doing premarital counseling I asked him if he was a Christian, and I could tell by his reply he didn't really understand what a Christian was, so I shared the gospel with him, how to accept Jesus Christ, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord to him that received him, he gave the power to then become the sons of God even to those who believe on his name Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock and if any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.." I shared that with him and this man bowed his head in my study and invited Jesus into his heart. He got a new life and he got a new wife. About two weeks after they were married, he was leaving church on a Sunday morning. I think it was the first Sunday back from their honeymoon and he had a big grin on his face and said, "I have never been happier." I thought he was talking about his marriage, but he said, "I am so happy you told me how to become a Christian." That afternoon about two o'clock his wife called me. I went over to his house and Milton had suffered what they later determined was a brain aneurysm. Physically, he survived but his mind was scrambled from that time on. He couldn't carry on a conversation. He could look at you like he understood what you were saying, but his mind was hopelessly scrambled. I can remember his wife saying to me, "Oh brother David, I'm so glad that you shared Jesus with him and that he was saved before he became like this." I don't know all the wheres and where-to-fors I don't know how God deals with somebody like that, but I know Milton had an opportunity to respond and at that opportunity he took it and if he hadn't taken advantage of that opportunity, he might not have ever been saved.

The devil won't say to you, "There's no God." He won't say to you, "There's no Hell." He won't say to you, "There's no Heaven." The devil will say to you, "There's no hurry! Wait! Live it up!" This could be the very last gospel invitation you'll ever hear. You may never be closer to being saved than you are at this moment. In just a moment we'll give you an opportunity to respond to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

There was an executive consultant who was talking to a bunch of big business executives about "Time Management," and he gave a little introduction and he said, "Let me show you what I mean." He pulled out a clear, gallon pitcher from behind the podium and set it down. He said, "This is your life." Then he brought out a box of baseball-sized rocks and he said, "How many rocks do you think I can get in this jar?" He began to put them into the jar, and he said, "These are the important things you do in your life." He fit 5 or 6 rocks in there and he couldn't get another one in. He tried to and he couldn't so he said, "Okay, guys. Is the jar full?" They all said,

"Yes, it is full." Then he reached down behind the podium and brought out a pan full of gravel and poured it into the jar, filling in all the gaps. Then he said, "Is it full now?" They had caught on by now and they said, "No." And they were right because then he brought out a pan of very fine sand and poured it into the jar and he shook it down until it all had settled. He poured the sand to the very lip of that jar and he said, "Is it full now?" Some said, "Yes." some said, "No." Then he brought out a pitcher of water and he poured it in. He got almost a quart of water in that jar. He said, "That's you and that's how you spend your time. What's the lesson?" They thought for a moment and one of them said, "I guess the lesson is that you've always got time to fit other demands in your life." The consultant said, "Not at all. That's not the lesson." Somebody else said, "I guess what it means is in the middle of all the big, important things you do there are always gaps in your time." He said, "Not at all. That is not the lesson." They gave a few more answers and he said, "Wrong." "Wrong." "Wrong." Finally, they gave up. He said, "The lesson is this. If I hadn't put the big rocks in first, I never would have gotten them in."

If you don't put the big rocks in your life, you never will fit them in. The reason some of you are not spending time with Jesus every day is because it's full of a bunch of sand and gravel and water. The reason some of you aren't serving the Lord is because your life is filled with a bunch of sand and gravel and water! The reason some of you aren't sharing Jesus as you should your life is already full of other things. What you need to do is empty out some of those things and take those important things of life like spending time with Jesus, serving Jesus, sharing Jesus. Put those things in your life first. Then, you'll have time for the other things. The most important thing any of you can do today is accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. That's how to redeem the time!

OUTLINE

DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

I. SPEND TIME WITH JESUS

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." *Luke 10:41-42*

II. SERVE JESUS IN YOUR CHURCH

"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." *Ephesians 6:7*

III. SHARE JESUS WITH A FRIEND

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." *Proverbs 11:30*

IV. BE SAVED!

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." *Isaiah 55:6*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes