

INTRODUCTION

Over the years it was my joy to have some great conversations with our former Pastor, Paul Powell. Sometimes met for coffee and I would ask his advice. Paul graduated to Heaven in 2016 and we all miss him.

From my conversations with him, I learned that one of his very favorite verses in the Bible was the one we're going to look at in John 9 today. In the King James Version it says, "I must work the works of him who sent me for the night cometh, when no man can work."

A few months before Paul died, he preached on this verse at our Senior Adult Revival in CrossWalk. Paul wrote over 50 books in his life and one of them was entitled *The Night Cometh*. When he was the Dean of Truett Seminary on the Baylor campus, they built a beautiful building with a clock tower. Underneath the clock tower Paul had three words engraved in stone. It says "The Night Cometh." That's how important that phrase was to him.

Paul told me once that a Baylor Professor came to him and complained about those words. He asked Paul, "That's such a negative message. Why didn't you put something positive up on the wall?" Paul didn't like that very much and shot back at him. "It is a positive message. It is a positive message about the urgency of the now."

And he was right. Let's read about this in John 9:1-5: As he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him: Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him. We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

For most of humanity's history, we didn't have electricity. So people could only work during the daylight hours. When night came, they had to cease their working. The farmer had to put his oxen in the barn. The carpenter had to leave his tools on the bench. Night had come when no man could work.

Jesus had this sense of urgency as he approached the cross. It was a Sabbath Day and the Jewish leaders are going to attack Him because He broke the Sabbath law. But Jesus had a sense of urgency, and He took full advantage of the opportunity to heal a man born blind.

This is a message about opportunity. Do you know the origin of our English word opportunity? In the middle of the word opportunity is the word PORT. It is a word that came from the time before powered ships. When a ship sailed toward a harbor, 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."

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 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.'" Shakespeare had Brutus say in Julius Caesar, "There is a tide in the affairs of men. Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune—but if omitted all ventures are lost.

Here's a true story about a missed opportunity. Several decades ago, a man named Walter had a dream to build a fun-park for families. He spent all the money he had to buy a remote piece of property. He took his friend Art out to see the land. Walter told Art, "When I build my park, this surrounding property will be filled with hotels and restaurants in just a couple of years. You should buy it."

Art said he looked at that land and thought it was all a pipe dream, and it would never happen. He thought people won't drive thirty miles out here to this park. He could have afforded it, but he believed he would be wasting his money. He told Walter, "I'm sorry. Money is a little tight. I'll look at it later on."

Walter said, "Later on will be too late."

So Art Linkletter turned down the offer from Walt Disney. He would later say that not buying the land surrounding Disney Land was the biggest regret of his life.

We've all missed opportunities. In this message I want to mention three things that you should do NOW because the night is coming and you may lose the opportunity to do them.

1. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEND TIME ALONE WITH THE LORD.

Jesus had an earthly ministry of just three years, yet we read in Mark 1:35 that Jesus got up a great while before daylight and went out to a solitary place to pray.

That means that even though Jesus was involved in the greatest work in the history of the world—redeeming lost humanity—He didn't miss the opportunity to get alone with His Father and commune with Him in prayer.

Martin Luther once wrote: "I have so much to do today that I must spend the first three hours in prayer." And every day you don't get alone with the Lord in prayer, that day is gone forever. You'll never know how many blessings you forfeited by your lack of prayer. The old song says, "Oh what peace we often forfeit, or what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry – everything to God in prayer."

We Baptists are some of the busiest people on the planet. We schedule events and activities galore. But there is a great danger for you to be so busy SERVING the Lord that you don't set aside time every day to SEEK the Lord in prayer and personal Bible study.

"Mary had a little lamb; it would have been a sheep; but it became a southern Baptist and died from lack of sleep."

One of my favorite stories about Jesus is found in Luke 10. Jesus was visiting in the home of Mary and Martha. Martha was in the kitchen preparing a meal for the Lord, while Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus just soaking in His words. Martha shows us what it is to WORK for the Lord. Mary shows us what it's like to WORSHIP the Lord. I can just picture in my mind that Martha comes to the doorway in her apron and she motions for Mary to come help here. But Mary is listening to the Lord.

Finally, Martha gets so frustrated. That she complains to the Lord. She said, "Lord, tell Mary to come help me with the work!" Listen carefully to the words of Jesus and see if they apply to you. The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42)

No matter how busy your schedule is, don't miss that ONE THING. And that one thing is spending time alone with God. The night is coming when no one can work. Don't miss the opportunity to spend time alone with God .

2. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR LOVE TO OTHERS.

Let's go back to Mary and Martha's house again. In John 12 they were having a celebration dinner because Jesus had raised their brother, Lazarus, from the dead. Martha was busy serving, and we see Mary again at the feet of Jesus. This time she took a pound of pure nard, a very expensive perfume, and used it to anoint the feet of Jesus, then she wipes it with her long hair. The Bible says the fragrance filled the room.

Judas complained about it. He said, "What waste! This perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor." We read that Judas didn't really care about the poor. He kept the money bag and he was a thief. Notice what Jesus said to Him. "You will always have the poor with you. (That is true). But you do not always have me. She has kept this perfume to anoint my body for burial."

Jesus had told His disciples many times that He was going to die. But Mary is the only one who got it. She realized that Jesus wouldn't always be around, so she took the opportunity to express her love and adoration for Jesus. She not only TOLD him she loved Him. She showed him. And real love is always expressed with action. In 1 John 3:18 we read, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth." (1 John 3:18)

The night is coming. There will be a time when you will not have the opportunity to tell and show someone you love them. Is there a friend that you need to call or see today and say, "I just couldn't let this day pass without telling you I love you?"

Husbands need to say it to wives. Don't be like the old farmer who looked at his wife, Betty. He said, "Honey there are some times when I have such a deep feeling of love for you that it's about all I can do not to tell you." Tell her, guys! Children need to say it to parents and grandparents. And parents and grandparents need to say it to children.

Men who are friends ought to be able to risk your masculinity by telling that friend, "Man, I love you." One day the opportunity will be gone.

On December 22, 2005 Tony Dungy, head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, got the phone call every parent dreads the most. His son James, 18, had committed suicide. No matter who you are, you are never ready for something like that. Suicide leaves an indelible mark on those who are left behind—a deep pain that never goes away. What do you say in that instance? Because he is a Christian with a strong faith in God, Tony Dungy spoke at his son's funeral service. This was his advice to other parents: "Hug your kids every chance you get. Tell them you love them every chance you get. You don't know when it's going to be the last time."

There are some things that you probably need to say to someone TODAY or that opportunity will pass. You need to tell someone, "I love you." Or "I appreciate you." The night is coming when no one can work.

3. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE YOUR FAITH WITH LOST PEOPLE.

I think we forget sometimes that a person who hasn't placed their faith in Jesus is spiritually lost. We call them nice terms like unchurched, or unbelievers. In religious surveys, they are called "the nones" because they are people who have no attachment to faith or a church.

But I want to remind you that a person who is without Christ is LOST and is facing an eternity separated from God in a place the Bible calls Hell.

Jesus used that terminology in Luke 19:10. He said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

I believe everyone listening to me knows someone who is lost without Christ. 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. Night is coming when no one can work.

Charles Carter was the pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama when I was a college student at Samford University. I was in a preaching class and our assignment was to do a term paper on a famous preacher. Most of the class did papers on people like Charles Spurgeon or Dwight L. Moody. I decided to do a term paper on Charles

Carter. So I interviewed him and through that process, he became a friend and mentor to me. I heard him tell a story about when he missed an opportunity to share his faith with a friend.

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. Charles 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!

Opportunities come and go. Night is coming when no one can work. Today God has given you an opportunity to share your faith with a friend or family member. Tomorrow that opportunity could be gone.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE: TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOLLOW JESUS TODAY!

When Jesus called the disciples to follow Him, He didn't hang around and wait for their answer. He found Peter, James, John, and Andrew with their fishing nets. He said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." He kept on walking. They had to act at that moment, or the opportunity would be gone.

Jesus found Matthew working as a tax collector. He said, "Follow me." And He kept on walking. Matthew had to leave his tax records immediately or he would have missed the opportunity.

Today, Jesus is telling you, "Follow me." Will you respond today? You may think you are young and have plenty of time left. I need to remind you that the night is coming and after death, there won't be an opportunity for you to turn to Christ.

Some insurance policies have what is called a "grace period." If you don't pay your premium on time, the insurance company extends your coverage for a short period of time, hoping you'll pay the premium. But if you don't pay the premium, the grace period runs out and the policy will be cancelled. God has a grace period, too, and you're in it today. We are living in the age of

grace today. Salvation is absolutely free—but there is a limit to your grace period. You are facing a Divine Deadline. It could be one of two deadlines: you could die unexpectedly and that's the end of your grace period, or Jesus could come suddenly and rapture the church. At that point, your grace period runs out. Like the old country preacher said, "You are either going to meet the undertaker, or the upper-taker, but either way, you'd better be ready to meet God!"

The best day to be saved is TODAY. The Bible says, "See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!" (2 Corinthians 6:2)

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."

There is an imaginary story about a strategy meeting between Satan and three of his top demons. They were discussing how to ruin the human race. One demon said, "Let's tell people there is no God."

Satan said, "That won't work. When people look at creation and their own conscience, they know there's a God."

The second demon said, "Let's tell them there is no hell." Satan said, "That won't work either. There is so much evil on the earth, they know there has to be a hell."

The third demon spoke up and said, "Let's tell them there's no hurry."

And Satan said, "That's it! Go and tell them 'there's no hurry' and you will ruin millions of lives."

So the devil is the one who puts the thought in your mind, "I have plenty of time to trust Jesus." He is whispering right now, "there's no hurry."

When it comes to salvation, hesitation can lead to procrastination which can lead to eternal devastation.

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 car accident." Oh, no. You survived those. The closest you are to death is today. Don't let another day go by without placing your faith in Jesus.

As Jesus approached the cross, He had a sense of urgency about everything He did. He said, "We must work the works of Him who sent me because night is coming when no one can work."

We need to have a sense of urgency about our lives. Don't miss another opportunity to spend time alone with God. Don't miss another opportunity to tell someone you love them. Don't miss another opportunity to share your faith with someone who needs to be saved. But most importantly, don't miss the opportunity you have today to place your faith in Jesus.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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