

Time to Get our Priorities Straight

It has been estimated that the average person on the North American continent today will spend a good bit of their lives wasting precious time. For example, one report claims that, during the course of a lifetime, the typical person will spend: (1) Six months sitting at stoplights, (2) Eight months opening junk mail, (3) One year looking for misplaced objects, (4) another full year watching TV, (5) Two years unsuccessfully returning phone calls, and (6) Five years waiting in line. That's a lot of wasted time. So, how we spend our time is important because time is valuable stuff. People sometimes say that "*time is money.*" And yet, that really isn't true, because if you lose your money, you can always make some more money. But, the same is not true of time. Once you lose time, it's gone—you can't recreate it and you can never get it back. So, when you think about it, time is a lot more valuable than money.¹ Believe me, no one on their death bed is ever going to say, "*Oh, I sure wish I had a little more time to spend at the watching TV, or playing a video game.*"²

And because time is so valuable, God expects us to make good use of it. He expects us to prioritize the things that we devote our time to. The other day, I was reading a modern day version of what Jesus' encounter with the *Rich Young Ruler* would be like if it took place

today, instead of about 2,000 years ago. It was written by pastor and author, David Henderson, and is based upon the traditional story that is given to us in Mark 10:17-31.³ But today, it might have to be renamed as *“Story of the Busy Young Man.”* Now, I am not going to read to you the traditional version of the story found in Mark’s Gospel—not because it isn’t important (it certainly is), but because the full text is included in this morning’s handout. But, I’d like for you to consider this modern version of the story to see how Jesus’ encounter with this busy young man might play out today if they met on the streets of Gordonsville or in the Town of Louisa or down at Zion Crossroads. This is what it might sound like:

- *As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him. “Good teacher,” the man asked, with a glance at his watch (he only had 10 minutes before his next appointment), “what must I do to get eternal life? I could really use some advice as to how I can better use my time.”*
- *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good except...” But before Jesus could go on, the man’s I-phone rang and he motioned for Jesus on hold on for just a second. He answered the phone and quickly blurted: “Hello? Hey, listen, I’m right in the middle of something right now. You gonna be at this*

number for a while? Great. I'll call you right back." Then, he lowered his phone and motioned for Jesus to continue.

- *Jesus went on to say: "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "*
- *The man quickly whipped out his tablet, stroked his finger across the surface of the screen several times and let it come to rest on a list that he'd prepared quite some time ago. Then, with an impatient look on his face, he turned to Jesus and said: "Teacher, I have all of those things on my planning list and there is a big check mark that I have put by each one. So, come on, I've been doing this stuff since I was a kid. Is that it? Isn't there something more that I need to do?" Then a little alarm went off on the man's wrist watch reminding him that he was late for his appointment.*
- *Jesus responded, "One thing you lack. Go, clear your schedule of all your self-important activity. Then come and give all of your time to Me."*
- *The man's face fell. He glanced again at his watch, closed his tablet, and slowly shook his head. He gave Jesus a quick handshake and said, "Well man, it was really nice meeting you. Maybe we can do lunch sometime." Then he turned and quickly*

walked the other way, for he had a great many things to do, and places to go, and people to see.”

- *Jesus looked around to His disciples and said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a busy man to enter the kingdom of God. For many who are busy now will have more than enough time on their hands in the days to come—for what is there to do in hell but while away the endless time? But, those who return their time to its rightful owner now will be joyfully occupied for all eternity.”⁴*

Now when we hear the story in those terms, it begins to hit a little closer to home. Both this modern adaption and the traditional version in Mark’s Gospel point to the same theme, and it is this: In order to have eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven, you need to have your priorities straight. And, one of the greatest priorities to get straight is the way that you spend your time here on this earth. Paul, in his letter to the Church in Colossi, tells us what that priority should be when it comes to the way we spend our time. Referring to Jesus, this is what Paul wrote: “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, SO THAT HE HIMSELF WILL COME TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERYTHING.” Colossians 1:18 (NASB) And when Paul said that Jesus is to “have first place in everything,” that certainly

includes the way in which we spend our time. Sometimes when we hear this story, we tend to deflect its application away from us by thinking: *“Well, that doesn’t apply to me. I am no ruler, nor am I rich. I am not even particularly young. I get the message, but it is meant for someone else, not for me.”* But, when we identify the man as *“a very busy person,”* then the picture begins to look a lot more like us, because it focuses on whether you will give back to God what God has given to you. And what God has given to you is life on this earth—for a certain time. David realized this when he said: “Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should.”

Psalms 90:12 (TLB) **And so, the question is: Will you use your time wisely by giving Jesus priority when it comes to the “*number of your days*”? Or, will you put Jesus in a distant second place? And in today’s busy world, the temptation is put Jesus on the shelf until a more convenient time comes to get around to Him.**

So, how can we re-orient our thinking in a way that encourages us to give unto Jesus the best of our time? Well, think about it terms of the things that are essential in meeting your daily needs in life. We all know that we must take the time to meet our vital needs. For instance—from a physical standpoint, we can’t afford to become dehydrated, so we need to take the time to drink plenty of water.

Convert that thought into a spiritual concept. Remember that Jesus told the woman at the well that if she really understood His identity, she wouldn't have asked for ordinary water. Rather, she would have had Him give her water that would quench her eternal thirst.⁵ And so, take the time to be spiritually refreshed and come to the well of Jesus Christ.

Look at it the same way with respect to rest. We all must take the time to rest. Your body will become rundown, weak and prone to sickness if you don't get proper rest. But, our souls need rest just as much as our bodies do. ²⁸ Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT2) Take the time to be still and meditate—pray to Jesus. Lay your burdens at His feet and find His peace and His rest.

Many of us have gotten to the age that we have to take the time to carefully attend to our medical needs; otherwise, we become sick or could even die. But, the same is true of our spiritual lives—we need to prioritize our time in this regard as well. God promises us: ²⁵ "If you worship me, the LORD your God, I will bless you with food and water

and take away all your sicknesses. Exodus 23:25 (TEV) **There was a woman who had been suffering from an ailment for 12 years. The doctors tried, but could not cure her. Yet, with just one touch of the hem of Jesus' garment, she was healed. How did this come about? Jesus explained it by telling her: "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble."** Mark 5:34 (TEV) **And so, take the time to worship God regularly, and your faith will grow and you will be healed—not so much of bodily ills, as of those sicknesses affecting the soul. The sickness of sin can only be cured by the love, mercy and grace of Jesus Christ.**

In what other way do we need to prioritize our time? We all know that in order to continue living, we need to eat. We need to eat in order to nourish our bodies. Again, there is a spiritual parallel. If we don't take the time to feed upon God's Word, we will starve spiritually. Now, some people will try to just sample what the Bible has to offer. They do it every once in a while, particularly if some troubled time descends upon them. But, don't just snack on God's Word—*feast upon it*. I wish there was a physical food that you could eat that was really good tasting, and the more calories that you consumed, the healthier and sleeker you'd get. If they could invent that kind of food, I'd be Charles Atlas, Pop-Eye and one of the Avengers all rolled into one. And,

the reality is that such a food does actually exist—not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. God’s Word is loaded with spiritual calories that are off the chart. But, those heavenly calories won’t make you fat and lazy. You can eat all you want. You can stuff yourself without guilt or shame. And yes, if you ingest His Word and allow it to become part of your composition, you will grow spiritually strong and healthy. I love the way Paul describes this kind of nourishment to Timothy when he tells him what will happen if you adopt such a *Jesus-saturated diet*. He tells Timothy: “You will be a worthy servant of Christ Jesus, one who is nourished by the message of faith and the good teaching you have followed.” ¹ Timothy 4:6 (NLT2) The Apostle Peter followed this up by saying: ² “Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³ now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.” ¹ Peter 2:2-3 (NLT2) Both Paul’s and Peter’s thoughts were born from something Jesus quoted from the Scriptures during His temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus proclaimed: “People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4 (NLT2) God offers to us the *living bread* of His Word upon which we may grow strong and healthy spiritually.

For us, partaking of this spiritual food and drink, as we will do in a few minutes during the Lord's Supper, is absolutely critical. For when we look about at the world around us, we truly get the sense that time is not only precious, but that time may be running out. Yes, time for Christians may be running out for us here in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. And because of that, we are surely going to need God's spiritual nourishment if we are to remain brave and free, and stand strong for Christ. Paul, who was well aware of Christian persecution and knew what it was all about, gave this warning about making the most of our time: ¹⁵ "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Ephesians 5:15-17 (NASB) What did he mean by that—"the days are evil"? Warren Wiersbe explains: *"In Paul's time, this meant that Roman persecution was on the way." Paul understood that "the advances of sin in society" would certainly produce a cultural climate that would threaten Christians. And, if the days were evil when Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, how evil are the days that we currently face in this country?* ⁶

Well, in answer to that question, the days are quite evil indeed. Christian persecution is on a world-wide rise today. Fox News reports:

“The truth is, persecution is more prevalent and geographically dispersed than any other time in history. Approximately 215 million Christians worldwide experience very high to extreme persecution.” Newsweek reported in January 2018 that ‘the persecution and genocide of Christians across the world is worse today than at any time in history. . . [Even] throughout the [United States], outspoken Christians are regularly demeaned, debased and targeted for their beliefs. [The news media, liberal politicians, academic institutions and left-wing social groups] regularly ridicule Christians by calling them hateful, bigoted, and privileged, among other labels.”⁷

And in light of this rise in hostilities toward Christians in America, the “*days of evil*” that Paul referred to are descending upon us as well. While they aren’t killing Christians in the streets here in this country, as in other parts of the world, stronger persecution may be right around the corner, in one form or another. In recent years, Christians in America have been subjected to persecution, not only in the form of ugly words, but even their livelihoods have been under attack. Kelvin Cochran, the Fire Chief for the City of Atlanta, was fired when the mayor got wind of the fact that he taught a Bible study group that taught the Word of God⁸—particularly that part found in the Book of Leviticus that says: “No man is to have sexual relations with another

man; God hates that.” Leviticus 18:22 (TEV) Or, as another translation puts it: **“Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin.”**

Leviticus 18:22 (TLB) More recently, take the case of Jack Phillips, owner of Masterpiece Cake Shop in Lakewood, Colorado, who was persecuted by the State of Colorado because he stood on his Christian beliefs by refusing to bake a cake in honor of a same-sex wedding. He had to go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court where, in a narrowly defined ruling, he gained some relief when the High Court finally recognized that the political powers in Colorado had shown “hostility” (that’s a mild way of putting it) to his religious beliefs. Twenty years ago, if someone had told you things like this would be happening to Christians because of our religious beliefs, you would have thought they were crazy. Back in the 1960’s, Bob Dylan sang out that *“The times—they are a-changin’.”* Yes, they certainly are.

So, how are we to spend our time in these *“days of evil”*? Do we go about wringing our hands and meekly bemoaning our plight? Or, do we rage against our persecutors and fight them in the streets? No, God would not have us spend our time doing either of those things. If we will ever make any progress in turning this country around—and I believe that it is still possible to do so—we need to understand where our only hope lies. We need to bow to down to God and submit our

cause to Him and pray, as David did: **“My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.”** Psalm 31:15 (NASB) **We need to put down our I-phones, fold away our tablets, take out our Bibles, and make time for Jesus. Take the time to trust Him. Let Jesus order your days, fill your calendar and your life with what really matters most, and come follow Him. It’s really very simple—the best use of time is doing God’s will.⁹ And what is His will? It’s all bound up in something Jesus said: **“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!”** Mark 1:15**

(NIV) **That is our only hope. We all need to live our lives in that hope, before time runs out!**

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
May 5, 2019
Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor
©2019 All Rights Reserved

¹ Tope S. Aladenusi, “Giving Your Time to God,” Today’s Lifeline Magazine.

² Michael C. Northrup, Sermon on Time, <https://sermons.faithlife.com>

³ Mark 10:17-31 (NIV) ¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.

¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰ “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” ²⁸ Peter said to

him, "We have left everything to follow you!"²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

⁴ David W. Henderson, "Parable of the Busy Young Man," *Discipleship Journal* 25, no. 1 (January-February, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁵ John 4:9-10 (NIV)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Rich (Ephesians)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 47.

⁷ Dr. Kent Ingle, "Christian persecution not just happening overseas – many in US targeted for their faith, too," <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion> (Feb. 27, 2019).

⁸ Jenny Jarvie, "Atlanta fire chief fired after calling gays 'vile' claims religious bias," Los Angeles Times, www.latimes.com (Jan. 24, 2015).

⁹ RuthAnn Ridley, "Priority Living: Making Your Time Count," – *Discipleship Journal* 5, no. 1 (July-August), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: "Priority Living: Making Your Time Count".