

The Fierce Urgency of the Day

Scripture: John 9:4-5

Sunday, September 30, 2018

For the last two weeks you had opportunities to hear from those in our midst who have been given the gift of bringing God's word to us. Samuel spoke about the amazing blend of grace and truth that the Kingdom of God represents and how this has played out in his own life and faith journey. Then last Sunday, Arlis preached a sermon Titled WWJV, What Would Jesus Value. I think it is awesome that in a church our size we have so many who can preach and that too representing an age spread starting from the 20's all the way to the 70's. Has God blessed our church or what? I pray that God continues to multiply the spiritual gifts He has bestowed on our congregation.

Now, the question is, are you ready to get back into our journey through the Gospel of John? The last time we were in John we looked a very big question that Jesus sets up for us ahead of the sign miracle. The issue of why the innocent suffer if God is in control. We looked at what the Bible says about the topic in general and in the sign miracle Jesus will demonstrate how innocent suffering is turned to God's purposes specifically in the life of this man who was born blind. But before we get to the story, Jesus introduces another topic for us to ponder with these words, "as long as it is day, we have to do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work". And then he says, "while I am in the world, I am the light of the world". There are two things to remember here. What is Jesus talking about? Well, Jesus seems to be talking about a window of opportunity to engage in the mission of God. Secondly, we have to pay attention when Jesus talks about days and nights because He is the "light of the world". All this needs unpacking before we can deal with the healing miracle itself. So today we are going to

take a closer look at what Jesus means when he says, “as long as it is day, we have to do the works of God”.

There is a famous speech given by the late Rev Martin Luther King Jr that includes these words, *“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The “tide in the affairs of men” does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: “Too late.” There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. “The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...”*

What I love about these words is that they are brimming with echoes from scripture. But there is one phrase in these words that is a reference to the very words of scripture we have read today, “the fierce urgency of now”. This is the phrase I have adapted for my sermon title today.

Our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ put it this way, “as long as it is day, we have to do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work”. This verse seems to suggest that God has sent Jesus to do a work and He has a window of opportunity to do it. But because Jesus is using the collective word “we” he seems to be saying, it is not just true for him but for everyone. In that case there are only two things to do. Check if we are understanding the message correctly and then re-ordering our priorities in obedience to what we have heard.

Now, when you are deriving a principle from a verse of scripture, to make sure we are hearing it correctly, it is very important to test and see if this principle is attested to in other parts of scripture as well. If not we could actually be a misreading the verse. So

let's do that exercise for the principle we are looking at today. To examine this idea, I want us to look at two of Jesus' parables. First, the parable of the "Narrow Door" in Luke 13:22-25.

The context of this teaching is that after Jesus' disciples went out preaching about the kingdom of God, someone asked Jesus, "so Jesus will only a few people be saved?" And to that Jesus specifically tells them that there is a narrow gate into the kingdom of heaven and you have to be hard at work when you can. Because a time will come when the master will close the door and it will be too late. Verse 24 and 25 read like this.

²⁴ "Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. ²⁵ When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

Some people will read this parable and say, but what about ... So let's look at another of Jesus' parables found in Matt 25. The parable of the 10 bridesmaids. Now this parable talks about 5 of these bridesmaids being foolish and 5 were wise. And what makes the 5 bridesmaids foolish or wise? Well, you see these bridesmaids did not know the exact time of arrival of the groom. This has to do with the marriage customs in those days that we don't have time to talk about today because we have more urgent things to get to. But these bridesmaids knew how it worked. Yet only 5 of them got spare oil when they had the chance to get the spare oil. The 5 foolish bridesmaids decided to make an oil run when they got the advanced signal of the groom's arrival. Well, when the groom arrived, only the bridesmaids with the lighted lamps were allowed to enter the wedding celebration and the doors were shut. When the 5 foolish bridesmaids returned with the oil, they were faced with a shut door. At that point they cry out "Lord, Lord! Open the door for us!" But the master tells them, "Believe me, I don't know you".

Do you hear the similarities to the narrow door parable in Luke? There was a time to do the work of God. Then the window of opportunity gets closed. And at that point, no matter what appeals are made, the Lord in the situation says, “sorry I don’t recognize who you are, go away, the door is going to be closed for ever”. Harsh reality, right?

By the time we get through today, you will see that Jesus has been teaching about this limited “window of opportunity” to do God’s work in all four Gospels. But you might be wondering “what is the work that we must do with this urgency?”

Now Jesus describes the work, in John 9:4 simply as “the work of Him who sent me”. What does that mean for you and me? Well, to figure that out, we have to examine all the directives to us in Scripture. To help us look at the broad scope of these directives, I have put them in three categories.

Firstly, it is opening the door to having a relationship with Him. You have to start your spiritual journey, with a conscious decision in your life that you are going to give God the reigns of your life. There is a technical term for this. It is called being “Born again”. In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus, “unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God”. Friends, what it means is that you cannot just coast through life thinking that you are a Christian just because you were born into a Christian family. You have to make the effort to get to know Jesus yourself and once you get to know Him well enough, you have to give Him your house keys and your car keys and your bank locker keys. This process is different for everybody. But whatever journey you follow, step one is telling Jesus, I am ready for a new birth and a new beginning. Come into my house and here is my house keys and my whole key ring. And while you are doing this, make sure to do it while there is still day light, while you still have the opportunity. You can only give him the keys when there is day light, when you still have the opportunity to do these kinds of things.

Secondly, once Jesus is in your house, what do you think He would want to do? Go curl up of the sofa and watch TV? Not really. Jesus wants to come in and fix things. And my fixing things I don't mean just fixing your washing machine that is broken or even do a little remodeling. What Jesus wants to do is demolish everything, raise it to the ground and rebuild everything new again. Remember that is what he did to the temple, and then he is turning to you and saying now you are the temple of the living God. What would you expect He wants to do with you and me? But here is the deal. Our God is also very gentle. He will not work on the new house plans unless we give him the permission. That permission is the only thing that we need to do in all this. But that permission can only be given when ... can anybody help me with this... That is correct, when it is still day!

Thirdly, once God has come into your life and started a rebuilding project, he says now I am going to start using the new building that he is making. You see the construction and reconstruction work will go on for the rest of your life but usually in two or three years after the work has started, usually the first floor is complete enough for God to start using your new house in a new way. And this is the work we are called to do in other people's lives. This is the work of sharing of being Christ's hands and feet to others, this is the work of sharing what God has done in your life, this is the work of making disciples. All this work can only be done, when you still have daylight hours left in your life.

Because as Jesus says, night is coming when we cannot work. Well, what does that mean? Well it means that there are basically two end dates for all of us. One end date is when we die. The second end date is when Christ returns. Both these dates are something we don't know. Both can happen as early as today. Jesus was specifically asked about this question. And he gives a really long answer but in Mark 13 verse 32 he says this

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

In the Gospel of Matthew, 24 and verse 44, Jesus says, *“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* The church clearly understood the meaning of Jesus’ words because this is what Apostle Paul said about this in I Thess 5:2, *“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”*

So don’t wait for tomorrow to do God’s work, because Jesus says you don’t know if you will have a tomorrow. And Martin Luther King Jr says Tomorrow is today.

All this might sound very frenetic. Because you might be thinking, oh my God, the list of things to do sounds endless and if we don’t have tomorrow we have to keep working till we drop dead. In this culture where being busy is the greatest badge of honor you can wear, it is very easy to hear the words, “the fierce urgency of the day” as a call to be even more busy. Friends I am absolutely not issuing a blanket call to be more busy. What Jesus was trying to communicate through John 9:4 and through parables and prophecies in every gospel is that there are things of God that only you can do. Three categories of things if you will, starting a relationship with Jesus, starting the process of rebuilding your life and starting your mission to others. These things are the most important and urgent things of your life. What you have to make sure is that in your day, you accomplish the things that are both urgent and important. All else can be pushed to tomorrow. For some people this might mean becoming more busy. So some people this might be becoming less busy.

The point is, you cannot push to tomorrow what God wants you to do today, just because your To Do List for today is full of stuff already. That is not acceptable. When Samuel preached here we had a visitor who shared an amazing story. Her family was Hindu and she had started believing in Christ in her heart and nobody in her family knew

about it. Then one day, her father was on his deathbed, in a state of coma for many days. For many days he had not opened his eyes. The whole family was gathered around him. Suddenly Tanvi felt God nudging her to pray for her father in front of everyone in the name of Jesus. She boldly prayed knowing that at that moment everyone in her family would know about what she herself had done. She prayed and God rewarded her obedience by opening her fathers' eyes. This person who was in coma opened his eyes and smiled at her. And guess what, everybody saw it and everybody understood that Tanvi had decided to follow Jesus but that Jesus was present in the room and just did something powerful. Her father died soon after. But Jesus had been glorified in that moment. If she had delayed and said to herself, I will do this tomorrow, it might have been too late. The window of opportunity for her father, herself and many people in that room may have closed for ever. In Tanvi's case it did not because she knew that what she needed to do could not wait.

This my friend's is the fierce urgency of the day. There are blazingly urgent things that God puts into our lap every day. Things that cannot wait for tomorrow. I cannot determine specifically what these tasks might look like for you. That is between you and God. But I do pray that you and I will seize those things of God that cannot wait for tomorrow. Because tomorrow lays beyond our grasp. But today the sun has risen with its own fierce urgency. Today, is your day and my day. May we say yes to everything God wants us to do before the sun goes down forever on our calling and opportunities. Let us pray.