

Opportunity

By Dr. Charles S. Price

OPPORTUNITY! What a stupendous word! What garments of despair have been draped around its shoulders! What songs of hope have been sung upon its threshold! How many times that memory has taken us by the hand, and we have tried to open the door, only to find it locked on the other side, and we possessed no key. Opportunity! There is an old saying that opportunity comes to a man but once--that we hear the knocking at the door, and if we fail to open it, opportunity passes by and is forever gone. I do not, and I cannot, believe that!

Every day is a fresh beginning. Every day the world is made new to the man who knows the power of the cleansing blood of the Christ of Calvary. The dynamic urging of the Holy Spirit is born afresh a thousand times as we walk along the pilgrim way. Perhaps it is true that a certain opportunity was missed and a certain open door for a certain task at a certain time was passed by, but that does not mean our opportunities are gone forever.

That word "opportunity" rang through my soul like the clarion call of a bell in the steeple as I read the sixth chapter of Galatians and the tenth verse:

"As we have therefore *opportunity*, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

I commenced forthwith to look around for my opportunity, and while the thought was running through my mind, my heart led me to an open door.

One of the biggest mistakes a Christian can make is that of dwelling upon the failures of the past. It is both unscriptural and disastrous to meditate upon the sins of yesterday or the transgressions of the past years. I know of nothing that will impede the operation of holy enthusiasm in service for God more than the continual digging up of the spectres of yesteryear.

True it is, there is nothing beautiful about sin. Never, for even a moment, would I condone it; and as a disciple of Jesus and a preacher of His gospel, it is my duty to thunder forth the judgments of God against all unrighteousness. But what I ask you is--what would be the use of the prodigal son coming home if he is to spend the rest of his days thinking about the misery of the Pig Pen?

Where would be the chance of happiness in the heart of Mary of Magdala if the greater part of her time was to be spent in morbid contemplation of the unhappy years of her transgression? Personally, I always shudder at testimonies which are continually reaching back into the mud and scum of one's life and holding up sorry spectacles with such descriptive language as to make a congregation cringe.

Opportunity is not a child of the past. The doors of yesterday are forever closed, but opportunity is the servant of the present and the herald of tomorrow!

The Sun Will Shine

I want to impress you with the thought that even though we suffer today for the sins of our yesterdays, unnecessary contemplation upon that dark side will bring no help whatever to our souls. Yesterday is gone. The years that are past have been spent; and we are living in the midst of golden and glorious possibilities--the opportunities of today.

Some time ago a young couple, who were greatly disappointed because of the postponement of their start to the mission field, came to see me. In my heart there was no doubt about their call. From childhood they had dreamed of the day when they would champion the cross of Jesus in preaching the power of His cleansing blood in heathen lands afar. Their disappointment over the postponement was natural and human.

As we stood on the street corner discussing the difficulties, the young man sighed and then said, "Well, it means another year's delay in my opportunity to do something for God." You see, he lived and breathed missions and his perspective was so "fixed" that he overlooked opportunities near at hand in visualizing the one that was far away.

"Yes," replied his wife, "it seems to me that it is wrong for us to be here. Think of the souls who might be saved if only we could go;" and she too sighed in the spirit of disappointment and discontent.

"You do not have to wait a year," I said, "to do something for God." Just then a broken piece of humanity passed by on the sidewalk. Pointing at him, I said, "There goes a man for whom Christ died. A thousand men like him will cross the threshold of your life. I think, my young friends, that you will find ample opportunity to do something in the name of your Master and for your Lord before you sail away a year from now."

My words were not in vain! Both of them saw the mistake they were making, and they enthusiastically launched into the ministry of taking the water of life to the thirsty, and breaking the Bread Divine for the hungry.

Some of the greatest and richest experiences of my life have come to me because I have seized the opportunity to do something for Jesus at some opportune but un-looked-for-moment.

There is my "Golden Rule" man, whom I met in a store in Tacoma. Looking over my shoulder as I was buying a ruler, he said, "That is a good rule."

"I know a better," was my reply.

"Where is it?" he asked.

“In the Bible. It is called the Golden Rule. Jesus gave it to us when He was here on Earth.”

“Tell me more about it,” he said; and so I did, as I invited him to the tabernacle on the hill. That night he found Christ and since then has led the majority of the members of his family into the fold.

Then too there is the grocery boy whom I once invited to the meetings. Knowing that I was praying for the sick, he laughingly said, “There is no need for me to come, I am not sick. If I happen to get ill, I will come and see you.”

“But you are sick,” I said.

“Oh, no, you are mistaken. I never felt better in my life,” was his reply.

“Step through the door and I will let you look in the mirror, and you will see for yourself.”

You know what that mirror was. It was the Word of God. Two weeks later a sin-sick delivery boy came to the altar. He found Christ as His Saviour, and there was joy in my heart over another opportunity used for my Lord.

Moody's Lost Opportunity

I received a great deal of help by reading an account of Moody's work while in England. It was written by Dr. Dale, a famous English preacher. It showed me the seriousness of procrastination; and burned in my heart the great and eternal truth that there is no time like the present in which to do something for God.

Dr. Dale was a helper in the mission which Moody conducted in Birmingham. In one of his sermons, Dale said that Moody taught “with startling vigour and startling success,” that all who were living an irreligious life need to be converted, and that they could be converted at once; that all who heard him ought to repent and trust Christ at once; that they could receive the pardon of their sins and become new men and women at once. This is the correct nuance for evangelistic preaching--*at once*.

The text “Cast thy bread upon the waters and thou shalt find it after many days,” is too likely to comfort our souls. While it is gloriously true, the hope of the future must not keep us from working and looking for present results.

D. L. Moody learned a bitter lesson in his early days which greatly influenced the rest of his life. He was having great gospel meetings in the city of Chicago. On the fifth Sunday, October 8, 1871, he preached to the largest audience he ever addressed in that city from the text: “What then shall I do with Jesus, which is called Christ?”

Sankey sang powerfully:

Today the Saviour calls,
For refuge fly;
The storm of justice falls,

And death is nigh.

After the solo, Moody gave the audience a week to decide what to do with Jesus. That night the great fire devastated the city and many who were in the audience perished. On the twenty-third anniversary of the fire, Moody said with penitence to a Chicago congregation: "What a mistake I made! I have never seen that congregation since. I have hard work to keep back the tears today as I have looked over this congregation, for I do not see a single soul to whom I preached that night. I shall never meet those people again in the natural course of events, but I want to tell you I learned one lesson that night which I have never forgotten: that is, when I preach, to present Christ to the people, and then try to bring them to a decision upon the spot. I would rather have my right hand cut off than give another audience a week in which to decide what to do with Jesus."

Do It Now

If you have a kind word to say, *say it now*. If you have some service to perform, *do it now*. There is no joy like that which comes to your heart as the result of a consciousness that those things which you say and do are in the direct will of God--unhampered and unimpeded!

Some years ago I built a tabernacle in the heart of down-town Seattle. It was my first city-wide campaign in the beautiful northwest country. The opening service was a hard one, because the people were strange to me and I was strange to the people. During the last few minutes of my sermon, I debated whether or not to give an altar call. I thought perhaps it would be better by far to let conviction seize the people a little more, before I "pulled the net" for Jesus; and I decided to wait until the following night or perhaps the night after that before giving my invitation for people to accept Christ.

Then in my heart I heard the sweet voice of the Spirit. It was not a message of reproach, but an appeal in which I could feel the tenderness of heaven. It almost broke my heart. He whispered, "Do it now. You will have an opportunity tonight *you will never have again*." So, in spite of the hardness of the meeting, I invited those who had never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ to kneel at the mercy-seat and become acquainted with Him--the Christ--who is able to save.

My first convert was an Italian woman. Tears stood in her dark eyes as she clasped my hand and thanked me for leading her to Jesus. Ten days later one of the cooperating ministers came to me with the sad news that the previous night the little Italian woman had left the tabernacle and had taken a street car home. As she stepped from the street car, however, a great truck came swiftly along the edge of the curbing. It was dark at the intersection, the lights of the truck were very dim, and the impact was terrific.

Before she passed away, after being carried into a nearby house, she sent a message to the preacher who had almost failed to give an altar call: "Tell Brother Price I am ready to go," she said, "for I know I am going to a land where I shall see my Savior." As the curtains of time were drawn across her eyes, the angels from the land of glory sang her welcome home. When my preacher friend told me, my heart stood still for a minute, and then the tears came! Only the Lord and I knew how close I came to missing an opportunity that night.

The Land of "Might Have Been"

It is easy to think of the chances we have had and missed. One of the saddest sights our eyes can behold is that of a man standing on the brink of the chasm of Lost Opportunities and looking across the intervening space at a wonderful land, calling "Might have been."

How sweet it is to know that in the Atonement of our blessed Savior, the past is all under the blood. Therefore, spend not your time digging up the corpses of the sins and mistakes of your yesterdays, but use that same effort in building a highway over the plains of the present toward the hills of tomorrow. Instead of continually bemoaning the losses of yesterday, why not begin to thank God for the opportunities of today.

If you have a loved one who knows not the Saving Christ, speak to him *now*--but remember those words are empty if unsupported by a life in keeping with those words! If there is some task that is awaiting your willing hands, do it *now*. If there is someone who needs a kindly word of encouragement from your lips, speak it *now*. If there is someone thirsty, who needs the drink that you can give, give it *now*.

Tell me not that opportunity passes your way but once and, having passed, is forever gone. No matter what the years gone by have meant and brought, *now* is the accepted time and today is the day of salvation. The road of tomorrow leads to the "City of Never." Though the highways of yesterday are dark and dismal, the sunshine of today can never pierce their gloom.

Beloved, as you have opportunity, do good to all men. Weep not because of the loss of the chances of yesterday and do not wait for the open doors of tomorrow. Opportunity is a restless creature, and the time of her operation is *now*. There are many folk, upon whose graves you will place flowers in the by and by, who would appreciate far more a few of them now. Kind words by the side of an open tomb are in order and have their place, but the world is hungry for more of them to be poured into ears that are able to hear. Someone needs your song. Sing it! Someone needs your prayer. Pray it! Someone needs your gift. Give it! Someone needs your service and ministry. Why not give it now?