

FORFEITING LIFE'S OPPORTUNITY

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Luke 19:41-42.

On three occasions Christ wept. You know them well, but it may be worth while to refresh your memories. When He came to the grave of Lazarus, observed the sorrow of the sisters, and meditated upon the havoc which sin wrought in the death and corruption of the body, Christ wept. The second occasion was when He beheld the city of Jerusalem and burst suddenly into tears over it. This is the occasion which we shall study in this service. The third occasion was when He was at Gethsemane, at which time a shower of bitter tears was mingled with bloody sweat. In Hebrews 5:7 we read, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." The strength of His love strove with the anguish of His soul, and in the process forced forth the sacred waters of His eyes. Our Lord weeping at Gethsemane was induced by the great burden of human guilt which pressed upon Him.

Sincere and genuine tears are always touching. In our text we have a picture of the Saviour sobbing out His great heart as He stood on the Mount of Olives with the city of Jerusalem, the most renowned city of that day, unfolded like a panorama before His eyes. There must have been a compelling reason why Christ thus wept as He looked over the city. The reason was that so many of the people in that city had allowed their religious opportunities to pass by unimproved. They had neglected them. While thinking of the sin, the guilt, the unrest, the heartaches and the broken lives of the people who resided in Jerusalem, Christ felt the sadness more than any mortal could.

Jerusalem was the most renowned city in that day. The Israelites exulted in its power, rejoiced in its resplendent history, and were charmed by its beauties. It was a privileged city. The Temple added to its fame. Its people had been blessed by the presence and ministry of the prophets, the priests and John the Baptist. To climax all of these religious privileges, Christ blessed it with His presence, example, love and words. As an evidence of His love for her people, Christ walked the streets, opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, comforted the sorrowing, pointed out numerous dangers and called the wayward to repentance. Yet, as Christ stood there on the mountain and looked down on the city, He saw more than its splendors, beauties and historic significance. He saw the sins of the people which had brought on the impending doom. He saw the city's marred manhood, unhappy homes, intemperance, poverty, impurities and iniquities. The pleasure-loving crowds, beautiful buildings and resplendent history could not blind the eyes of Christ to the true conditions that prevailed there. He knew full well that this proud citizenry had rejected Him and His teachings, and that they had forfeited their supreme opportunity.

While He saw the certainty of the doom of the inhabitants of the city, He actually lamented the necessity of it. His inward grief was so intense that it could not be restrained. He was weeping because the citizens of Jerusalem were lost. He lamented their wilful ignorance which had caused their doom. He wept because they had neglected, abused and misused His

Father's house; yea, they had converted it into a house of buying, selling and cheating. He wept because the people had forfeited and lost their golden opportunity. Cities have their opportunities, but if they, like Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, Nineveh and Babylon, keep on saying no to God and His messengers, they, too, will pass away and be no more. Christ stood there and wept because of what He saw ahead for them. He foresaw the destruction of the city and its people. The floodgates of His grief were lifted by their inevitable ruin.

As Christ stood in full view of Jerusalem, reviewing its history, recalling its opportunities and observing its rushing on to an inevitable catastrophe, He cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38).

I. Opportunity Is Provided For Us.

Think of the opportunity to live, to have the use of our faculties, to enjoy health and strength, and to capitalize on the privileges of life. Think of the privilege of listening to life's calls, of being stirred by its challenges, of weeping with those who are brokenhearted, and of rejoicing with those who are happy. Think of the glorious spiritual opportunities which we have. Truly this is our day of opportunity. Let us make the most of it.

There is but one thing that can satisfy a soul and that is Christ. How pitiable it is to see a person trying to feed his soul on the husks of the world! Christ alone can save and satisfy. Every person should hurriedly accept Christ as his Saviour, and then make the most of every opportunity that comes to serve Him.

This day of opportunity is limited. It is but a step from the cradle to the grave. It is easy to die. Here is the strong man who is hale and hearty today, but tomorrow he will be cold in death. "Our hearts like muffled drums keep beating funeral marches to the grave."

Why should anybody want to breathe the ozone of God's goodness, bask in the radiance of His sunlight, be protected by His love, and then override His wishes, trample all of His mercy under foot, and come to the end of life's day of opportunity without having accepted His proffer of salvation? "Today if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart." At the longest life is short. Time flees. Job said, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle that hasteth to the prey." Emerson was right when he said, "Life masters itself while we are preparing to live."

II. Opportunity May Be Forfeited By Us.

The light of Jerusalem did not go out all at once. The light of the average individual who has passed through life and died unprepared did not go out suddenly. While the individual basks in the sunshine of God's blessings, the opiates of the world dull his sensitiveness to the call of the Lord and he goes to sleep. This is a danger point that is critical and crucial. Once there was a railroad accident. The switchman

was called to account for it. Trembling, he said: "I have nothing to say; I went to sleep." Think of a man sleeping at the switch! Think of a fireman sleeping while the city is wrapped in a conflagration! More and worse than that, think of a person sleeping when the light of his soul is flickering!

Awake from the stupor of your seared conscience and answer the clear call of God by repenting of your sin and receiving Christ as your Saviour, while you have the opportunity.

Perhaps you were once tremendously interested in your salvation. You had the conviction, which was deep and pungent, that you should become a Christian. Now you have reached the point where you do not have the response to those high and holy impulses that you once had. You now find it easier to reject Christ and postpone your salvation.

Dr. Chapman told about a Christian man inviting a young man to accept Christ. The young man replied: "I have a character that is rugged as the hills of Scotland. I do not need your Saviour." He began his moral descent in New York and went to the bottom, a moral scavenger in Chicago. The same man visited him in a Chicago hospital. When he entered, the young man raised his hand and said: "My God, sir, isn't it awful?" Then he said, "Get on your knees and pray for me." When the prayer closed, he lifted his hand and urged: "Tell every man you meet that sin is too mighty for him; the devil is too strong for him."

The day of your opportunity will come to an end. "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Death, sudden or otherwise, will put an end to your opportunity.

There is no question that death is on the heels of everyone. It grins in the face of every person in the world. The grim reaper may sneak upon you at any moment and put an end to your earthly life. It has happened with so many; it can, it may, happen in your case. Why not be wise and accept Christ as your Saviour before it does happen? If you knew that you would not have another day in which to prepare to meet God would you trifle with and forfeit your opportunity? You do not know that you will have another day, do you? Every dictate of wisdom, every reason of logic, should lead you to settle the matter of your relationship to God in the right way now.

"Tomorrow's sun may never rise
To bless thy long deluded sight;
This is the time, O then be wise,
Be saved, O tonight."

Before your doom is sealed by death, or by the return of Christ, accept Him as your Saviour and live. You cannot save yourself, but Christ can and will save you when you trust Him.

The withdrawal of the Holy Spirit will end your opportunity. God's Word says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." To be abandoned by Almighty God is to be doomed forever. Don't bring that to pass, but accept Christ as your Saviour now.

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"