

GRACE & PEACE

An E-periodical For spiritual enlightenment, edification and encouragement.



IN THIS ISSUE :

Perspective	Study	Outline	Reflection	Exhortation	Anecdote	Practical
Opportunity: Seized or Missed?	Brief Notes on Tabernacle-6 The Pillars of Brass	Five Points of Time	Moses's Retrospection	How Mary Faced Trials	Lost Rope	The Role of Church Members
1	4	4	5	7	8	9

OPPORTUNITY: SEIZED OR MISSED?

 By Nelson Thomas

Once again we are coming to the end of another year. Most Christians will have a special time of praise and thanksgiving, remembering the won-

derful ways of God in the past and seeking His continued blessings for a happy new year. Definitely, a grateful heart and a prayerful attitude will ensure a satisfied and peaceful life ahead. However, instead of making this a ritualistic yearly service it would be more appropriate if we would use this occasion for a sincere evaluation of how wisely we used our time. Such a personal spiritual exercise will help us to make necessary amendments, trusting in the Lord.

extends our life so that we may become more fruitful and useful for the Lord. This becomes even more imperative when we realize the fact that hundreds of God's people have been called Home in the recent past, and some of us have been left behind with a definite purpose.

That is exactly what the Lord Jesus teaches in Luke Chapter 13 through the parable of a master who sought to cut down a fruitless tree. Christ wants us to realize that He expects fruits and hence He continues to give us opportunities and needed resources. Therefore brethren, let's not neglect the expression, 'Sir, let it alone this year also!' (Luke 13:8)

Often we realize the value of time and opportunity only when they are gone. That's why it's good to learn lessons from others. Never forget that success or failure basically depends on how wise we are in making use of our opportunities. Let us briefly consider few tales of people who missed golden opportunities and regretted later, so that we may not repeat their mistakes.

OPPORTUNITY



SEIZED

MISSED

Extended time

We should not forget that the Lord in His grace and mercy



1. The rich man who failed to make sure of his eternity, Luke 16:25

We believe the Lord Jesus is referring here to a true story. (Luke 16: 19 – 31) This wealthy Jewish man who ended up in the Hades laments now. Father Abraham reminds him, “*Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things...*” (v. 25) Abraham further tells him of the impossibility of any help at this stage. (v. 26) It was not because he was rich, but while on earth he miserably failed to trust the Lord for the forgiveness of his sins. He never bothered to consider the condition of his life after death.

Millions today make the same mistake, while simply going on enjoying the pleasures of this world. They may be religious who faithfully follow the rituals, but never take time to examine their true spiritual status according to God’s holy word.

More than anything else, our priority must be to make sure of our eternity. That’s possible only by confessing our sins and trusting in the saving work of Christ today. (John 11:26; Acts 16:31; Rom. 19:9, 10)

2. The bridesmaids who failed to be watchful, Matthew 25: 10 – 13

The parables in this chapter may have a different meaning in the dispensational point of view, but now let us pay attention to the practical lessons for us today.

Out of the ten virgins who waited for the arrival of the bridegroom, five were not well prepared. They were foolish and careless. That resulted in their rejection in spite of their passionate appeals. (v. 11).

The Lord Jesus made the application very clear and loud, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*” (Matt. 25:13) The Lord’s message for His people at any period of time is this; be watchful always. (Rev 16: 15; 22: 11, 12, 20)

Do not just assume that we are ready in every aspect. We ought to examine our faith and practice in the light of God’s precious word and make sure we are prepared indeed. The strange thing is, many who are so enthusiastic and intelligent to be well prepared in connection with their worldly affairs, are not serious enough when it comes to their spiritual life. Remember, there may be many reasons to be indifferent today, but any regret and pleading tomorrow will be of no use. (Matt 7: 21 – 23)

3. The servant who failed to use his master’s resources wisely. Matthew 25: 24 - 30

In the parable of the talents, Christ wants us to be aware of the value of the possessions at our disposal and how to handle it. Never forget, all that we have today whether health, wealth, or opportunities, all have come from the Lord. As faithful and wise stewards we ought to make use of these resources according to His will and for His glory.

The two men who got talents from the master traded with it and made it double. But one of them did nothing. What was the response of his master to him? Not only did he rebuke him severely, calling him, ‘wicked, lazy and unprofitable’, he punished him too. (vs. 26 30)

Consider all the benefits we have enjoyed during the past one year; how much have we utilized these for the purposes of God? One day our Master will come and ask for an account. The faithful servants will be appreciated and rewarded appropriately. Needless to say, the unfaithful will be ashamed.

It was in this context that the Lord made a golden principle, *“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”* (Matthew 25:9)

4. The people who failed to take care of God’s people, Matthew 25: 43 - 45.

Here we see a group of people who will argue at the time of judgment. When the Lord says, *“I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me”* (vs. 42, 43), their answer is that they never saw Him hungry, thirsty or naked.

That means they were willing but never found an opportunity to serve Christ. The Lord’s answer is significant, *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”* (v. 45)

Yes, this passage definitely refers to a different dispensation, but let us not neglect the valuable truth implied here. The Lord Jesus in glory takes note of our services for His brethren. (v. 40) What we do for God’s people is counted as what we have done for Him. (Matt. 10:40; 18:5)

Paul’s admonition in this regard is poignant, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) There is an occasion to serve one another. Seizing such opportunities, we ought to serve the Lord’s people, for that is the way we serve our Lord. Have we used our resources and time for helping the needy in the past? (Eph. 4:28)

5. The apostles who failed to pray. Matthew 26: 40, 41.

Even after the Lord Jesus repeatedly instructed the apostles to pray lest they fall into temptation, they simply slept. As a result, they could not withstand the crisis that followed. Peter took out a sword, which he was not supposed to do; (v. 52) later they even forsook Christ and fled. (v. 56) Earlier also the apostles had experienced the consequences of neglecting a time of prayer. (Luke 9:28, 32, 40)


Often, more than anything else we find it difficult to pray, because it’s there on our knees we win our spiritual battles. No wonder Paul describes the prayer of Epaphras as a labor. (Colo. 4:12)

Apart from the normal daily prayers, how much time do we spend alone at the feet of Christ? It’s time that we examine our personal prayer life. Have we seized the opportunity to pray faithfully and satisfactorily?

All the above mentioned examples show how important it is to wisely make use of the time God has graciously allotted to us. Let us be conscious of the times and the uncertainty of life. (Rom 13:11) Let us fulfill our responsibilities today itself, for tomorrow may never come. (Eph. 5:16)

To all our esteemed readers, well-wishers and prayer partners, we prayerfully and sincerely wish a very happy and Christ-centered New Year 2022.

BRIEF NOTES ON TABERNACLE – 6: THE PILLARS OF BRASS

 By Charles .E. Wigg , Australia

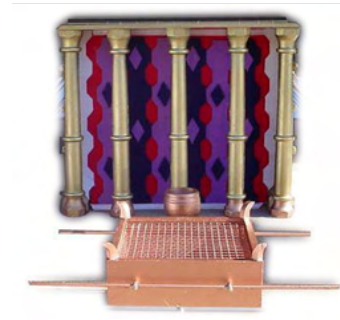
As we have seen, the pillars were also of brass, the same as the socket in which it stood. (Exo 27: 9 – 15) This shows that if one is to stand for God, they must also expect to suffer, 2 Tim. 3; 12. Though none can share the atoning sufferings of Christ, nor even understand them, yet we are called to share His sufferings, that is, His testimonial sufferings, the sufferings of reproach, persecution, reviling etc.

In Philippians Paul tells us that it is given to the believer not only to believe on Christ but to suffer for Him also, Phil.1;29. Then in chapter 3, he speaks of knowing Christ and,

“The fellowship of His sufferings”, ch.3; 10. To the Colossians he said that he filled up “That which is behind of the afflictions of Christ” in his flesh, “for His body’s sake”. So today any who will stand for Christ, and will not lean before the winds of persecution or of doctrine, must expect to invoke the criticism, condemnation and persecution of others, sometimes even of those with whom they are in fellowship.. Eph.4;14.

However the brass pillars, though the strong winds of the wilderness would hurl the sand and grit against them, it would only polish the brass and make them

shine the brighter.



THE SILVER RODS :

These rods connected to hooks on the bands of silver, and joined pillar to pillar, thus uniting the fence into one continuous thing. In contrast to the pillars which stood up, the rods laid down. This brings to mind the verse in 1 John 3:16, which tells us that “because He laid down His

life for us’, (the silver), “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”.

The fact that the rods are silver, suggests persons who have a very deep sense of the mercy of God, such as Paul, “the chief of sinners” had. The Lord Jesus said, “Her many sins are forgiven; for she loved much; but he to whom little is forgiven loves little.” (Luke 7: 47)

Dear believers like these, seldom insist on having their own way, or stand up for their own “rights”, but by their humility and self-denial unite the believers in the local assembly and their testimony.

SERMON OUTLINE:

FIVE POINTS OF TIME

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. The fullness of the time, Gal 4:4 | – The birth of Christ. |
| 2. The consummation of the ages, Heb 9:26 | – The cross of Christ. |
| 3. The end of the age, Matt 13:39 | – Close of the age of grace. |
| 4. The fullness of times, Eph. 1:10 | – The millennium. |
| 5. The end of time, 1Cor 15: 24 | – The eternal kingdom. |

MOSES'S RETROSPECTION, DEUTERONOMY 31: 1 – 13

 By Dr. Stewart McNaught

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses looked back over the way that they had come so as to prepare them to go forward. He reminded them of what God had ordered in the past so that they would know how to order their lives in the future. He retraced the story of the wilderness to prepare them for the Promised Land.

A looking back to remember should also involve a looking forward. Moses was now ready for his entrance into the presence of God. He would soon make his journey to Mt. Nebo and there be at home with his God, the Lord. Before he set out on this his last journey he made preparations for his departure. He could not leave the people of Israel to their own devices. A good leader should always prepare a successor.

**PREPARATION,
DEUT. 31**

**PROMISE,
DEUT. 31:6**

**ENCOURAGEMENT,
DEUT. 31:13**

PREPARATION, DEUT. 31

In this chapter, Joshua is appointed as successor to Moses and he becomes the leader of Israel. It could have been said that Joshua was fitted for this position from the moment he distinguished himself in the battle with the Amalekites, Exo. 17:9. Joshua had been Moses' right hand man from that time on, Exo.32:17.

Moses had waited before the Lord in prayer before he nominated Joshua as his successor, Number 27: 15 – 20. When Moses was ready to go to Mt. Nebo he called for Joshua and set him before the people as their new leader, Deut. 31: 7, 8.

PROMISE, DEUT. 31:6

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them.” This word, “fear not” is one of the great words of God to His people. It was God’s word of encouragement to Abraham, Gen 15:1; it was the Lord Jesus’ constant word to His disciples, Matt. 10:26; Luke 12:32. It is a word that the Lord’s servants need today.

It is a word of encouragement, “Do not be afraid of circumstances, I will never leave you nor forsake you.” It is a word of exhortation, “Go on and do it, you can, for I am with you.” It is a word that enables, “Have not I commanded you?” The Christian need not be afraid of anything material. God is for us and who can be against us?

The word is found ten times in the book of Deuteronomy, 1:21; 3:2, 22; 20:3; 31: 6, 8. It is found in the call to the people to re-gather and go on to the Promised Land; it is Moses’ constant exhortation to the people in all their trials and difficulties; it is Moses’ final word to Joshua. If believers today could only grasp the significance of this promise how much stronger they would be in the witness to Jesus Christ! “Fear God and you need fear no one else,” this word of encouragement from an old saint is still valid to believers today, Deut. 6:2, 13, and 24. The great Grace of God hinges on the Christian’s belief in the promise of God and his confidence in this, ‘Fear Not’.

ENCOURAGEMENT, DEUT. 31:13

In this final encouraging message to Joshua, Moses reiterates the theme of his words to Israel, “*Listen, Learn, and Live.*”

Listen to the word of God through His servants the prophets. The hearing ear is always blessed by God. Christians should pray to have a hearing ear, Deut. 29:4.

Learn - this is the real way of exhortation. As has been said before, learn is the great word of this book. It is found seven times in Deuteronomy, Deut. 4:10. To learn from God through His word is the supreme lesson of all. Hear with the intent to learn and live.

Finally, live. Life is the promise of the Gospel. Life does not mean mere existence; it is the abundant life through Jesus Christ, life in all its fullness. It’s a life that is satisfying, sanctified and saved from sin and sorrow. This life comes from the new life that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a life that is founded on a rock, the promises of God.

“

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

— *Winston S. Churchill*

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HOW MARY FACED TRIALS

 By Bro. Tom Johns USA

I would like to examine the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is interesting to see how God dealt with Mary, the vessel God chose from eternity past to bring the Son of God to this world. The news of her pregnancy must have brought the first shock.

It is hard to believe, as some would try to say, that every virgin in those days were hoping to hear such news. If so, why did Joseph have to be instructed not to put away Mary? Why were even Jesus' own half-brothers unconvinced of Jesus and His divine origin? Why would not the Pharisees and scribes spread the palm branches or coats in His path and welcome Him as the Messiah?

HUMILIATION

There is every reason to believe that Mary had to suffer harsh words and evil gossip, just as any other woman who happened to become pregnant without the consummation of marriage. God did not announce this event in the midst of flashing lightning or piercing thunder.

It was not an event as we saw in Mount Sinai. It was brought to Mary by one angel with no fanfare. God could have chosen glorious circumstances; but He chose not to. Mary and Joseph could reasonably have asked why God decided to put the mother of Jesus through such humiliation.

Jesus had to go through the normal gestation period in the womb

of Mary. Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, fully pregnant, covering a long distance. Considering the gruesomeness of travel conditions, it must have been very difficult. We do not read of any "heavenly chariot" which transported this tired mother of Jesus while she was providentially fulfilling God's promise of Him being born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

POVERTY

Mary was not received with welcome signs and there was not anyone fighting over receiving Mary and Joseph as honorable guests. On the contrary, "there was no room for them in the inn," and Jesus was laid in the manger. The Creator of the world, and everything in it, found to be lacking a place to rest His head, at birth and even as an adult (Matt. 8:20). Why didn't God make it easy on Mary and Joseph as they carried out this most important mission?

Jesus, the Son of God, was circumcised on the eighth day. At the end of the forty day purification time, Joseph and Mary brought two turtle doves to the temple as an offering.

It seems as though they could not afford a lamb as some other richer families could have (Lev. 12:6). The carrying of the Son of God in the womb for nine months did not come with a "lottery winning." Joseph and Mary remained poor. God could have made them rich; He chose not to.

HARDSHIP

We do not see any heavenly manna pouring over Joseph's house during Jesus' stay there. In fact, Joseph continued his physical labor to provide for the family. He was known in the neighborhood as a carpenter or mason (Matt. 13:55). God could have set a scrumptious table at Mary's house every day. After all, it was the Son of God who lived in that house; but God chose not to. In the city of Nazareth, "the Child grew and became strong increasing in wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40).

Jesus must have increased in wisdom as he grew to the full knowledge of His own divine origin and purpose of incarnation. God could have avoided all these and brought Jesus as a grown mature Man to this world; but He chose not to. He assigned Jesus to the care of struggling, normal parents.

IGNORANCE

Mary and Joseph were not extraordinarily spiritual in discerning the mysteries surrounding Jesus. When Simeon said "my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:30). Mary and Joseph did not understand much. At the temple, when Jesus told his parents that "He had to be in His Father's house," they may not have understood the spiritual implications of his statement. There

was no instant spiritual maturity or insight they gained supernaturally by having the Son of God under the same roof.

Mary must have waited patiently for 30 some years for vindication. At the wedding of Cana, she must have felt it could be time for her acquittal.

She approached Jesus and informed Him of the shortage of wine. But Jesus distanced Himself from her by addressing her as a “woman.” The term “woman” was not derogatory, but was more formal. In today’s terms, it has the same meaning as “lady” or “madam.” Why was He acting so “strangely” to his mother?

By now, we do not see Joseph in the picture. He could have died or been incapacitated by now. Nothing seems to go smoothly for Mary.

DISTRESS

At the time of the crucifixion, Mary must have been devastated like the disciples. She must have sensed the fulfillment of the prophetic words of Simeon and might have felt the writhing pain of the “sword piercing through her soul”, while Jesus Christ was being crucified (Luke 2:35). All her efforts seemed to have been wasted. Indeed, most of us would also feel dejected after enduring repeated disappointments. Nothing seemed to go well for Mary. There are times when we feel that no doors are open; we are surrounded by thick walls and total darkness. She must also have felt the same way.

We do not read anything about Mary after the resurrection of Jesus. There was no special appearance to Mary from the Son of God whom

she carried in her womb for nine months, or at least no record of it. For us, it is an unfinished story. It is possible that Mary was in the crowd at some point, even at the time of the ascension.

But we do not see Jesus walking to her, thanking her, or giving a hug, as any mother could reasonably expect. Her name was not even mentioned further in connection with Jesus as her son in any special way. Acts 1:14 makes a casual reference to Mary, but then she is no more to be seen.

The New Testament does not give any account of Mary seeing the finished portrait God was creating with her life. Job, at least, was able to see a conclusion for his miseries. He was blessed beyond measure even while he was alive.

(To be continued...)

“

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

--- *Ephesians 5: 15, 16*

”


ANECDOTE:

LOST ROPE

On the English coast there are men who climb the cliffs for eggs. They are let down by ropes and fill their baskets as they stand on projecting ledges. One man as he began to collect happened to let the rope slip, and there he stood helpless as the rope swung out – a hundred feet from the top of the cliff, and many more from the angry sea below him.

Instinctively he knew that he must catch that rope as it swung back the first time, because it then swung nearer to him than it would again, and lose it meant starvation and dizziness and a plunge into the sea below. So watching intently, he calculated its speed where it would swing in and as it came he jumped for it, and – caught it. If he had not done it then he would never have done it.

THE ROLE OF CHURCH MEMBERS

 By, Dr. Justus Samuel

In the first place, each believer must recognize that he/she is also in the ministry, speaking in general terms. Those who serve and minister the word are doing a piece of service to achieve this very end. In Ephesians 4: 12- 13, we are introduced into this purpose, even when there is the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic and pastoral-teaching ministry, viewing the churches' ministry as a whole.

MINISTRY

**NATURAL
DEVELOPMENT**

**THE ROLE OF
THE SERVANT**

TENDER CARE

MINISTRY

This ministry is for equipping the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, to enable them to reach spiritual maturity and conformity to the likeness of the Master. This is a misunderstood verse. In the first place, we believe that we avail of the ministry of the apostles and prophets – not that these gifts are literally present today, but we avail of the written Word in the New Testament where we have such ministry.

The ministry of the servants of God is not designed to sharpen their gifts, but to make each brother and sister realize his/her role as a witness for Christ. The local church is in the ministry rather than the preacher. He must encourage the process through a ministry of encouragement. It is not a question of encouraging every Tom, Dick and Harry to be up every meeting (they will not do if they are mature.)

NATURAL DEVELOPMENT

Proverbs 18:16 tells us, “A man’s gift makes room for him.” This means a gradual development, not a monstrosity, an unnatural development. You should always be cautious of a stripling, of recent years (a recent convert in terms of 1Tim. 3:6.) We sometimes observe a young man with the ‘gift of the gab’ seen addressing a major conference comprising believers of maturity. Such a thing is bound to harm the performer more than the listener.

No, there must be the natural growth – infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth and manhood. You cannot shortcut the process. In the spiritual world there are no prodigies. It has been said of poet Coleridge that the tragedy of his life was he never was a child! Let’s not encourage would be prodigies but by all means encourage the youth as they gradually and steadily grow up. The kingdom of God never faces emergencies. The Lord has His plan well prepared.

THE ROLE OF THE SERVANT

The perfect servant is first adumbrated by Isaiah in chapter 40 and then gradually developed beginning from chapter 42. In chapter 42:1 we are asked to 'behold' His servant. "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!" Concerning His tenderness it is recorded, "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench." (v. 3)

This passage is applied to our Saviour in Matthew 12:18, 20. In v. 20c we read, "TILL HE SENDS FORTH JUSTICE TO VICTORY." His coming into the world would mean a crisis, but He would not stop until that crisis issues in victory.

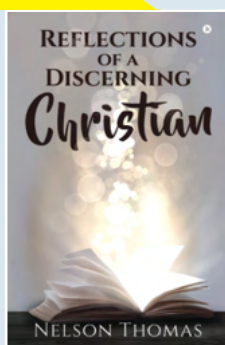
TENDER CARE

Such is the Lord's dealings with His own. Oh! the tender care of the shepherd, especially when it comes to the weary and with young. (Isa 40:11) So must be tender care of the shepherd servant represented by those who have the care of the flock. The staff in the hand of the shepherd is not to smite the sheep with, but to protect them from the marauding wolves. The shepherd has his gentle staff by which he leads and guides the sheep.

The servant has no rights; he is there to serve His people. If properly taught in the word, the believers will regard their leaders and take an interest also in their mundane needs. It is all a matter of outlook on his part.

Both the assembly and the servant – shepherd must imbibe the right outlook and attitude. Then the conflict ethos will cease, His way will prevail in the assembly.

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