

DON'T MISS THE BLESSING

Mark Beard

Text: Luke 3:8-9

“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” NIV

The problem with human beings and their relationship with God is that we often feel tempted to believe that we have “arrived” when we adopt a religious mindset. There is something deceptively comfortable about being a part of a religion system. The deception for some is that they, *like those people in our text*, think that something besides a relationship with Jesus Christ is what assures them of present and eternal blessings.

Nevertheless, the truth is that, what we do is every bit as important as what we say. We are compelled to act on our faith! And we are clearly warned about the misfortune of failing to act!

Billy Graham said that, “Every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear full responsibility for the next one; but we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible as to how well we fulfill our responsibilities to this age and take advantage of our opportunities.” --Leadership, Vol. 12, no. 4.

Although God wants to use everyone we must always remember that no one is assured the blessing of God without their desiring them—especially those who lack the proper *desires*.

I would like to point out three areas in which we are given clear opportunities:

- 1. Exalting Christ**
- 2. Leading in God’s kingdom**
- 3. Serving Christ**

The mandate is this: We must take advantage of every opportunity to serve God or we will miss out on his greatest blessing!

I. IF WE WILL NOT PRAISE HIM, THEN ANOTHER WILL SING HIS PRAISE IN OUR PLACE (Luke 19:37-40).

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." NIV

- A. Religion, left to its self, will become nothing more than a social club where everyone has to bow to the approval of the Pharisees.**
- B. Jesus messed up their play house by putting God back at the center of worship.**
- C. We have a choice—we can lift God up... or get left out!**

II. IF WE WILL LEAD FOR GOD, THEN ANOTHER WILL LEAD IN OUR PLACE (1Samuel 15:26-28).

But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you.

- A. Saul could have had the blessing of God, but instead, he sought the approval and praise of people.**
- B. It would appear that Saul had more to offer as a king than David did, but the desires of his heart revealed the truth.**
- C. David wasn't seeking to lead, but he was willing to lead.**

III. IF WE WILL NOT BE FAITHFUL TO SERVE, THEN ANOTHER WILL SERVE IN OUR PLACE (2 Timothy 4:9-10).

Paul writes, “Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica....”

A. Demas failed to serve because of what he loved.

The allure of the world was not the problem—what his heart craved was the problem. For years churches tried to legislate holiness among its people by making rules, “Don’t go there...”....”Don’t do that...” etc... There may have been good guidelines, but it ALONE could bring holiness to people’s heart.

B. The world and sin holds little or no allurements for a heart that does not love it! What we love determines what we seek!

C. If Demas didn’t want to serve, God would use someone who DID want to serve.

Paul tells Timothy to come to him quickly and, in verse 11, tells him to bring Mark with him. He writes, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” NIV¹

¹ NOTE: "Mark" had had a checkered career. We first meet him in [Acts 12:12](#). When Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, "he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark." Barnabas and Paul took him to Antioch ([Acts 12:25](#)) and then took him with them as "their helper" on the first missionary journey ([13:5](#)). But the young Mark "flunked out" and returned to Jerusalem ([13:13](#)). Because of this, Paul refused to take him along on the second journey ([15:36-40](#)). Later Mark matured and was with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment ([Col 4:10](#)). Now the aging apostle gives his young associate his highest accolade: "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful

As someone has said, “No opportunity is ever lost; the other person takes those you miss.”

S.D. Gordon said it this way, “We have nothing to do with how much ability we've got, or how little, but with what we do with what we have. The man with great talent is apt to be puffed up, and the man with little [talent] to belittle the little. Poor fools! God gives it, much or little. "Our part is to be faithful," doing the level best with every bit and scrap.”

-- S.D. Gordon in *The Bent-Knee Time*. Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 6.

CONCLUSION

There are many reasons why people miss out on God's best. For some it is laziness, for some, they feel entitled for some reason. But I think for most, it is fear of failing or because of a perceived failure in the past.

There is a well-worn story about a young man who almost let fear and failure stop him from seizing his opportunity to be more than he had been.

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, overtook and downed him sixty-five yards away, just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the

to me in my ministry." So John Mark is a vivid example of a young man who failed in his first assignment, but finally made good.

floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands, and cried like a baby.

If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second."

The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second."

Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you. I've ruined the University of California. I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life."

Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back. Those Tech men will tell you they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

We take the ball and run in the wrong direction. We stumble and fall and are so ashamed of ourselves that we never want to try again. And God comes to us and bends over us in the person of His Son and says, "Get up and go on back; the game is only half over." That is the gospel of the grace of God. It is the gospel of a second chance, of a third chance, of the hundredth chance.

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 392.

We are not God's children by right—but by grace. And whereas we cannot earn God's grace, and should not feel that our salvation is in constant jeopardy, we are nevertheless expected to be fruitful. If we fail to be fruitful God will bypass us in His plans for the Kingdom. Such is the seriousness and the demands of the Kingdom.