

A TIME TO GET SAVED!

Today's Text: Ecclesiastes 3; 2 Cor. 6: 1-2

Extracts:

1. *To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under the sun. ...I have seen the God-given task which the sons of men are to be occupied.... I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him [Eccl. 3: 1, 10, 14]*
2. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation [2 Cor. 6: 2(b)]*

*In William Shakespeare's famous play, **Julius Caesar** [1599], a group of senators, led by Cassius and Brutus, conspired to assassinate Julius Caesar, a renowned Roman general. Their motive, according to them, was patriotic, to preserve the republican status of Rome. The opportunity was ripe because they were able to convince the headstrong general to come to the Senate floor, in spite of warnings from soothsayers and his wife that his life was in danger. They in deed succeeded in killing him but did not plan for the people's reaction. In response to the funeral oration of Mark Antony, a close Caesar ally in the Senate, the Roman troops turned on the conspirators. As they closed in on them, Brutus made the following famous statement [Act 4, Scene 3]: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries."*

This statement is in line with Ecclesiastics that there is "a time for every purpose under the sun" [Eccl. 3: 1]. If Brutus and his co-conspirators were supposed to have done everything right and at the right time, why did their cause fail? How many times have you felt right and confident about certain decisions and actions concerning your future only to regret it all. How many times have you done dumb things that turned out to be pleasantly right? Are you anxious to be able to go about making your choices and be sure of the outcomes without worrying about timing? Is it all chance or luck? These and more are the questions that we shall resolve in today's study.

1. The drones and the workers are both very busy!

We are familiar with such clichés as “A stitch in time saves nine,” and “Time and tide wait for no man.” Another one says, “Strike while the iron is hot.” All of them emphasise *timeliness* in whatever we do. The question is how do we know that the timing for anything is right? Who determines timeliness? Why is speed so important when the word of God keeps telling us such things as “Be still and know that I am God” [Ps. 46: 10], and “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” [Ps. 37: 7]?

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from the bees.¹ In a typical beehive, there are worker-bees who are busy round the clock, building combs and collecting honey. Then, there are the drones whose only function is to fertilize the queen bee and die! While waiting, they are unproductive. They are larger than the workers and they cannot even sting. All they do is buzz, that is, make much noise, and eat! However, their reproductive function is essential for the preservation of the species. By our standards, we call lazy people drones. Are drones lazy or they are waiting for their time to perform? Are the worker-bees more important because they are workaholics and contribute to the well-being of the colony? Perhaps, the best conclusion that we can draw is that the drones and the workers are *both busy performing their God-given essential duties!*

2. Is there then the right time?

The word of God says [Eccl. 9: 11]:

*The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time.***

If time is beyond human knowledge, how about chance? Does this chance mean luck, as most of us think, or that both time and chance are determined by God? To answer those questions, let us examine a set of scenarios, using cases from the word of God:

a) *Wrong timing and wrong motive*

If the chance we want to take, no matter how promising it may be, is based on a wrong motive, that is, from God’s perspective, and our timing is off, the likelihood is that we are bound to fail. Even if we succeed, it cannot last. For example, thieves may carefully plan how to rob a bank and at the time of escaping with their loot get caught by the police. A student may

¹ Adapted from M.R. De Hann, M.D., “Drones,” *Our Daily Bread* [2005 Annual Gift Edition], Friday, April 29, 2005

have been cheating at his/her exams to get high marks only to be caught one day when s(he) least expects it.

Following the failed rebellion and death of Absalom, his younger brother, Adonijah, became David's firstborn [1 Kgs 1: 5-6]. He knew that God had already told his father that the throne would pass on to Solomon, his younger brother by another mother. Adonijah decided to get himself crowned king while his father was on his dying bed but not yet dead. Therefore, both his motive and timing were off the mark. David then made sure that Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet duly anointed Solomon, and paraded him before Israel as the new king [vv. 8-40]. Adonijah's adventure became a monumental failure. In due course, he was executed [1 Kgs 2: 25].

b) *Wrong time but good motive*

What we plan to do may be right in the sight of God but the timing is not right. For example, a parent may be desirous to give his/her three-year old daughter a good university education but s(he) will have to *wait* until she has grown up and completed her primary and secondary school education. In like manner, there are many things that we are anxious to achieve- get or change a job, own a home, get married or raise children, etc. We may perceive that the timing is wrong. If we get sentimental and go ahead, we may regret the decision. If we wait, we may achieve our purpose in due course. The opposite results can equally occur!

A good example is the case of king Saul who was required to wait for prophet Samuel at Gilgal for seven days to make burnt offerings to the Lord before going to war with the enemies. While waiting for the prophet, the Philistines mounted pressure on the people of Israel. Moreover, Samuel delayed his coming. So, out of fear and panic, the king went ahead to perform the sacrifice, a duty meant for priests. Soon after, Samuel arrived! For that disobedience, Saul lost his throne to David [1 Sam. 13: 1-14].

Compare that with the case of Joseph who was put in jail on a false allegation of attempted rape. He was desirous to be set free *as soon as possible* because he had done no wrong. Even after helping the domestic staff of the Pharaoh with the interpretation of their dreams, the butler (who was restored as prophesied by Joseph) forgot to mention Joseph's case *until two years later!* That was when Pharaoh badly needed Joseph's services. That was the road to his becoming the governor of Egypt [Gen. 40: 1-23; 41: 1-44]! The *waiting* was God's plan!

c) *Right time but bad motive*

Sometimes, what we plan to do may be wrong in the sight of God, even though we are convinced that we are doing the right thing. A young pastor who is lusting after a mutually interested married woman of his congregation will feel good when both of them are sent alone to a convention on behalf of his church. However, the outcome may not be what they expect. God may get them caught and publicly disgraced! Or they may change their minds before the act and repent.

For example, Jacob disguised himself to steal his twin-brother's blessing from their old father, Isaac. His motive was evil but his mother happened to have overheard her husband instructing Esau to go and prepare a meal and receive the blessing of God's promise to Abraham [Gen. 27: 1-33]. During her pregnancy, God had told Rebekah that she was expecting twin-sons/nations and "the older shall serve the younger" [Gen. 25: 22-23]. She did not want to miss the *right* chance for God's promise to be fulfilled! Does chance or God's plan explain this outcome?

Another example is Paul's journey to Damascus in furtherance of his persecution of the early church. His motive was against God's interest but the timing was right because it was persecution season and he had obtained the necessary legal papers from the state authorities. However, the outcome was not what he had expected. Instead, Jesus "arrested" Paul before he could reach Damascus and redirected his energies in the service of God and His Christ [Acts 9: 1-19]! Was that chance or God's plan?

d) *Right time and right motive*

Everything may look perfect. The motive is godly and you have the means to act. Isn't it proper to go ahead and take your chances? Are the odds of success not quite high?

A good illustration is David's desire to build God's house in Jerusalem. The timing was perfect because he had attained peace for Israel and had become quite rich. To build God's house is a holy desire which he eloquently expressed in one of the Psalms as follows: "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: *that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple*" [Ps. 27: 4]. He confided in his prophet, Nathan, who agreed with him saying, "Go, do all that is in your heart, *for the Lord is with you.*" However, that night, God appeared to the prophet and sent him to tell David that it was his son who would build God's house after David's death [2 Sam. 7: 1-13]. What if David had gone ahead to build without hearing first from God? It could have been a monumental failure!

3. Lessons

The following should be noted:

- ❑ *The only timing that works is the one set by God*, not mere chance. Human timing works best if it is in line with God’s timing, since His thoughts towards us are “thoughts of peace and not of evil” and to give us “a future and a hope” [**Jer. 29: 11**].
- ❑ *God sets the time for His purposes*. Before we were conceived, He already knew us and our days on earth He already numbered [**Ps. 139: 13-16**]. He is the only one who can lengthen our days [**1 Kgs 3: 14**] and the death of His saints is precious in His sight [**Ps. 116: 15**]. Therefore, He sets “a time for every purpose under heaven.” Whether it is a time to be born or to die, to plant or to pluck, to gain or to lose, to speak or to keep silence, to make peace or war, chance has nothing to do with it because “whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, *that men should fear before Him*” [**Eccl. 3: 1-14**].
- ❑ *God’s purposes are closely related to His salvation plan*, which He promised the fallen man, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden [**Gen. 3: 15**], namely, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” [**Jn 3: 16**]. This Son of God, Jesus the Christ, has asked us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all our earthly pursuits and needs shall be added [**Matt. 6: 33**].

4. Conclusion: The only right time is Jesus o’clock!

The word of God says “Behold, *now is the accepted time*; behold, *now is the day of salvation*” [**2 Cor. 6: 2b**]. When you confess the Lord Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved “for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” [**Rom. 10: 9-10**]. Those who believe in Christ Jesus and are led by the Holy Spirit are called the sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ [**Jn 1: 12; Rom. 8: 14-17**]. They walk by faith and not by sight [**2 Cor. 5: 7**]. Consequently, every step that they take along the time of life is sure-footed and God-led. Now, what does salvation through faith in Christ mean *in action*?

- ❑ *Salvation goes beyond upholding the Law of Moses* because the Old Testament spoke about Jesus the Christ who merely came to earth in human form to fulfil the prophecies therein [**Lk 24: 44**]. At the Transfiguration, Peter requested to erect three tabernacles: one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Immediately, a bright light overshadowed them and a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Hear Him!*” [**Matt. 17: 1-5**].
- ❑ *It goes beyond good works and religiousness*. Otherwise, God would not have sent an angel to tell Cornelius to send for Peter [**Acts 10: 1-48**]. He was a centurion of the Italian Regiment of the Roman army, “a *devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave generously*

to the people, and *prayed to God always*” [vv. 1-2]. Can you beat that kind of devotion? Yet, God asked him to send for Peter who came to speak to Cornelius and his household about Jesus. As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his household and they received water Baptism [vv. 34-48]. Only those who are baptized of water and the Holy Spirit (born again) can see or enter the kingdom of God [Jn 3: 3, 5].

- *Salvation goes beyond being very intimate with the members of the earthly family of Jesus!* The blessed mother of Jesus herself pointed us to her Son when she told the waiters at the wedding in Cana, “*Whatever He says to you, do it*” [Jn 2: 5]. When an impressed woman had heard Jesus’ sermon, she raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You.” In response, Jesus said, “*More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*” [Lk 11: 27-28]. When Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were calling Him, He looked around the circle of people listening to Him and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! *For whosoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and My mother*” [Mk 3: 31-35]. In Jesus’ words, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, *that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day*” [Jn 6: 40].

When you give your life to Christ and get saved, you will not need to worry about time because He has already taken care of that for you. The only time you now use is “Jesus o’clock!” But, if you reject Him as your Lord and Saviour, can you face Him when He returns as your Judge?

Take your time!