**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES**

**I KINGS 20:38-40**

 Someone has said, “Between tomorrow’s *dream* and yesterday’s *regret* is today’s *opportunity*.”

 But we find in our sermon one who missed their opportunity.

 If we are not careful we will find ourselves in the same boat.

 Too busy to do the things which matter.

 Too busy to do what God has called us to do.

 So busy, that we miss great opportunities to serve God!

 More importantly we miss opportunities to love God!

 Busyness means “*actively engaged in something; occupied. Filled with activity; never still.*”

 There is nothing in the Bible against a man becoming a diligent business man.

 *Diligence*, *skill*, *perseverance*, will always have their due reward.

 It will give you a certain amount of comfort.

 It will give you a fair share of pleasure.

 It will give you a certain influence with your fellow-men. That is right; there is nothing wrong in that.

 I want us today to think about “***Missed Opportunities***.”

 Someone has said, “*Between the great things we cannot do and the little things we will not do, the danger is we shall do nothing.*”

 We are all busy with different things, but let us be busy with the RIGHT THINGS—GOD’S THINGS!

 So often we find ourselves so busy with things of this life, that we neglect the NEW LIFE God has given us!

 We are so busy with life that we forget the Lord!

 We forget the Graciousness of God and His mercy and watch/care over us!
 We are so busy laboring for God; that we forget to love God.

 In I Kings 20, King Ahab had made a deadly mistake.

 He had *befriended* a man God had sentenced to death.

 God had given Ahab, king of Israel, 2 successful victories over Benhadad and his Syrian army.

 In the final victory, Israel which seemed as two little flocks of goats, yet they defeated 100,000 Syrians in the valley of Aphek. **(Af-ake)**

 The rest of the Syrian army had fled to the City of Aphek, where a wall fell and killed 27,000 more.

 God once again fought for Israel!

 Benhadad and his servants fled to an inner chamber.

 In this chamber, his servants tell of the mercy and compassion of Israel and persuade Benhadad to put on sackcloth and go out to Ahab to beg him to spare his life!

 Benhadad meets with Ahab in his chariot and they make a covenant together and Ahab sends him away.

 Ahab won the *battle*, but lost the *victory*.

 You cannot compromise the enemy!

 What the enemy couldn’t accomplish with their weapons, they accomplished with their deception.

 If Satan can’t succeed as the lion who *devours* ([1 Peter 5:8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Pe+5%3A8)), he will come as a serpent who *deceives* ([2 Cor. 11:3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Co+11%3A3)).

 Any suggestion that leads you off-track from the plan of God and the will of God comes from the enemy no matter how *pleasant* it may sound to the ears or to the flesh!

 This displeases God, who speaks to one of His prophets and tells him to go to Ahab with this parable.

 The prophet disguises himself, so as to not be recognized by Ahab.

 He tells him in v39b, “…*Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.*” Then in verse 40 he goes on to say, “*And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it.*”

 Just then the prophet took off his disguise and when recognized by Ahab said, “*Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.*”

 God was the captain and Ahab was only the keeper.

 You must remember that the contest was not simply between Ben-hadad and Ahab, but between the heathen and the living God who had been blasphemously challenged. Why was it not commendable (as it was at other times) to spare the vanquished? Because the motive was not pity, but *policy*; and the criminal allowed to escape had avowedly fought as Jehovah s foe.

 The man that Ahab judged now became Ahab’s judge and announced that one day the Syrians would slay Ahab.

 And Ahab went home heavy and displeased.
 Ahab goes home and pouts instead of *praying through*!

 I want us to focus our attention on v40 and see how busyness leads us to missed opportunities!

**I. BUSYNESS TAKES OUR CONCENTRATION OFF GOD**

 I Kings 20:40a, “*And as thy servant was busy here and there,*”

**A. THE DANGER**

 The servant was commanded and warned in v. 39, “*Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.*”

 But because of that servant’s busyness and lack of attention, he was gone.

 An Arabian proverb says, “*Four things come not back: the sped arrow, the spoken word, time past, and the neglected opportunity.*”

 When our minds are on earthly things, our attention is drawn toward them and we fail to think about God!

 James 1:8 says, “*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*”

 I can’t think about God and mind earthly things with all my attention, for I will show *more* attention to one than I will to the other!

 When I give more attention to earthly pursuits than I do to the pursuit of the Lord and the things of the Lord I am walking in the *flesh* not in the Spirit.

 The story is told of Henry IV of France, that he asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed the eclipses happening in that year. He replied that he had so much business on earth that he had no leisure to look up to heaven.

 The danger is that instead of seeing opportunities to *serve* the Lord and *be a* *blessing* to others I will miss them because of my busyness.
 Eugene Peterson said, “*I can be active and pray; I can work and pray; but I cannot be busy and pray.*”

 I love what D. L. Moody said, “*If you have so much business to attend to that you have no time to pray, depend upon it, you have more business on hand than God ever intended you should have.*”

 What happened with the servant here in I Kings 20:40 is true with many of us and opportunity—“*And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*”

THE DANGER
**B. THE DEVOTION**

 Friends, the truth of the matter is that the devotion I have to the Lord will determine my service to Him.

 If that soldier loved his country like he should have, he would have kept his concentration on the task at hand!

 We must live our life in the ways of the LORD and keep God close in our thoughts at all times!

 We read in Psalm 1:1-3, “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.* 2 *But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* 3 *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”

 The word “meditate” in Psalm 1:2 means in the Hebrew, “*To mutter to one’s self.*”

 It implies the idea that I am thinking and talking to myself in my mind about all the glories of God and His Word throughout my day!

 Charles Spurgeon said, “*Since I accepted Jesus as my Savior I have not spent 15 waking minutes without thinking about Him!*”

 Oh, that all believers could say that!

 Andrew Murray said, “*How many Christians look upon it as a burden and a duty and a difficulty to get alone with God! That is the great hindrance to our Christian life everywhere.*”

 When I meditate on God and His goodness throughout my day, it keeps my concentration on heavenly things, not on earthly things!

 David said, “*while I was musing the fire burned:*”—(Ps. 39:3).

 David said in Psalm 103:2, “*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:*”

 To do this, we must have an obedience of mind!

 The apostle Paul speaks in II Corinthians 10:5 of, “*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*”

 Friends, we will ponder on those things with which we fill our minds!

 It is not wrong to concentrate, but let us be as the Psalmist prayed, “*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*”—Psalm 19:14.

 Philippians 4:8 tells us what we should concentrate and think upon—“*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*”

**I. BUSYNESS TAKES OUR CONCENTRATION OFF GOD**

**II. BUSYNESS TENDS TO DIMINISH MY CONSECRATION TO GOD**

 I Kings 20:39-40a, “*And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.* 40 *And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*”

**A. DEDICATION**

 Friends, when you and I are dedicated to a purpose we will do every thing within our power to make sure that purpose is fulfilled.

 We will be consecrated to that purpose.

 That is what the word consecrate means—“*to dedicate, devote.*”

 The servant was commanded to “*Keep this man*.”

 From that moment his superior gave him an obligation; he was bound to that obligation and nothing could *free* him from it.

 He was to be dedicated to that purpose and that purpose alone!

 What has God called you to do?

 Romans 12:1-2 exhorts us to give our body as a living sacrifice to God, which is our reasonable service!
 But when I become so busy with worldly things that I neglect heavenly things, then I have sinned!

 When I devote my *time*, *effort*, and *ability* to other things, then that is time, effort, and ability that **could be used** for God!

 Thus I miss opportunities for *growth*, *fellowship*, and *service* with God!

 Someone has said, “*It takes not such a great man to be a Christian, it just takes all there is of him!*”

 Eugene Peterson said, “*Busyness is the enemy of spirituality. It is essentially laziness. It is doing the easy thing instead of the hard thing. It is filling our time with our own actions instead of paying attention to God’s actions. It is taking charge.*”

DEDICATION
**B. DETERMINATION**

 The problem this servant had is a problem we all face from time to time.

 He was more determined to do what he *desired* to do instead of what his captain had *commanded* him to do.

 We must give all ourselves to God and let Him do His perfect will for us!

 “*In the time we have it is surely our duty to do all the good we can to all the people we can in all the ways we can*” --William Barclay.

 My number one priority in this life should be Christ -*Living* in and *through* me-doing His Will! (Galatians 2:20).

 When I get so busy, I don’t allow Christ to control my life and I miss opportunities of *blessing* and *service* for God!

 No one should ever be too *busy* or *pressured* or *tired* to make a time and place for God in their lives.

 After all, He has to manage the whole world, and He’s never too busy for us.

 The Desert Fathers (a protest movement against worldliness in the early church) spoke of busyness as “*moral laziness.*”

 Busyness can also be an addictive drug, which is why its victims are increasingly referred to as “*workaholics*.”

 Busyness acts to repress our inner *fears* and personal *anxieties*, as we scramble to achieve an *enviable* *image* to display to others. We become “outward” people, obsessed with how we appear, rather than “*inward*” people, reflecting on the meaning of our lives. -- James Houston

**I. BUSYNESS TAKES OUR CONCENTRATION OFF GOD**

**II. BUSYNESS TENDS TO DIMINISH MY CONSECRATION TO GOD**

**III. BUSYNESS TENDS TO DRAW AWAY MY ATTENTION AND TAKE AWAY MY GOOD INTENTIONS**

 I Kings 20:40a, “*And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*”

**A. A SELF-CENTERED LIFE**

 The servant’s concerns were on his own things.
 His focus was on himself not others.

 He did not fail through ignorance; he knew his duty.

 Our greatest need is to *live up* to what we know.

 It is not that he does not know enough to accomplish his duty.

 We know the difference between right and wrong.

 It was not through lack of ability.

 When the man said he was “*busy here and there*,” he cut away the only excuse he could have had, because that showed he had ability.

 He did not fail through laziness. He was not idle.

 That enemy did not *overpower* him and get away.

 That enemy did not take him by surprise and then get away.

 He failed in his charge.

 Clovis Chappell said, “This he did not because his task was *impossible*. This he did not because his assignment made him *bitter* and *resentful*. No more did he fail because he was a deliberate *traitor* to his country. He did not commit any aggressive *crime*. Neither did he go wrong because be accepted a *bribe* for the release of his prisoner. He simply got so busy minding the business of someone else that he forgot his own.”

 It can down to simple neglect because of selfishness.

 This is the charge against the rich man in hell.

 We do not find a charge against him, other than the neglect of Lazarus.

 He did not drive Lazarus away.

 This is the charge of the 5 foolish virgins.

 It wasn’t that they had *water* in their lamps.

 It is not that they failed to *heed* the call to *come*.

 It was simply they did not have any oil. They were too busy doing something else.

 This soldier made no effort to fulfill his responsibility.

 He did not have any scars to show. He could not say proudly, “*Here, are my wounds for trying to keep my charge.*”

 We might have respected him then. He made no fight at all.

 The excuse is, “*I was so busy*”; which, first of all, is no excuse, because a soldier has no business to have any business but that which his commander allots to him.

 Just what he accomplished by being busy we don’t know.

 What are you really going to accomplish when you *leave* God out of the picture?

 What are you really going to accomplish if you *do* your own thing and *neglect* the will of God and your relationship with God?

 Ahab had been faithless to his trust. He had had the opportunity to crush out the enemy of Israel, but he had let him live for his own selfish purpose, and in sentencing the pretended soldier who had been faithless he was in reality uttering sentence against himself.

 When you fail to do what God has commissioned you to do you are condemning yourself!

 It doesn’t matter if you like the command or the Commander!

 The problem we all have today is that our attention is so focused on our *needs*, *wants*, and *desires* that we fail to see the needs of others all around us!

 Proverbs 29:18, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish:*”

 How are you going to accomplish something out there when you never stop and see the need right in front of you?

 We are our brother’s keepers!

 Maybe it’s our neighbor, our friend, or one of our family members!

 Someone that needs us to comfort or listen to them!

 Jean Fleming in “How Busy Is Too Busy?” said: “*We need to scrutinize the rush of our activities, because even venerable (honored) exertions may be keeping us from becoming and doing what God wants. A packed schedule may be detrimental not only to ourselves, but to those we seek to help.*

 *A few years ago our neighbors were drawn to us, but when we talked to them about the Lord, their response was, “*We couldn’t be Christians; we couldn’t live at your pace.*” They had been attracted to Christ, but the busyness of our lives had scared them from a commitment.*”

 What are we going to say when we stand before God and He asks us about the *man*, the *woman*, the *ministry* He gave us a charge over?

 That one responsibility He had for us to do!

 Friends, let us pray that our lives do not become so self-centered, even in our work for God, that we fail to *see* and respond to the *needs* all around us!

A SELF-CENTERED LIFE
**B. A SACRIFICIAL LOVE**

 It says of our Savior in Matthew 9:36, “*But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*”

 We must be just as Jesus; Stop. Notice those in need and help if at all possible!

 Galatians 6:10 tells us—“*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*”

 Notice what v. 40 says, “*And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*”
 I am sure this servant had *good* intentions but his busyness took away his *given* responsibilities.

 That one that is in dire need of our help may not always be there.

 We may have good intentions, but they must be *followed up* by action!

 As in Jesus’ Parable of the Great Supper we must “*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*”

 There is work which demands our attention, let us work till He comes!

 The chorus of that old hymn by Elizabeth Mills, “We’ll work till Jesus comes” says:

*We’ll work till Jesus comes,
We’ll work till Jesus comes,
We’ll work till Jesus comes,
And we’ll be gathered home.*

 Friends, let us pray that we will be working for Jesus till He comes!
 What is more important than saving your country?

 What is more important than saving your honor?

**CON:**

 The LORD has laid at our feet great opportunities!

 Let us not be caught up in our own affairs or worldly affairs that we fail to take advantage of the things God would have us to do!

 To do this God must be first in our lives!

 When He is first, then we will do His will first and then other things!

 Could you not seize him again? “*No, he is gone.*” Is there no making-up for past neglect? No recapturing the missing one? No, he is gone, clean gone.

 As with time, remember, your life has gone, and there is no living it over again.

 I hope you will not have to say, “*My childhood is gone; I cannot praise Jesus with a girl’s voice or a boy’s tongue now, for my childhood passed away in disobedience and folly.*”

 A man had once considerable wealth, but a turn of Providence has made him poor: it is a very unhappy thing if he has to confess, “*I did not use my substance for God when I had it. I was an unfaithful steward, and wasted my Master’s goods, and now I am no longer trusted by Him, my property is gone.*”

 Let us, as Moses, be “*Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*”—Hebrews 11:25.

 Let us be busy with the work of God, not the toils of life!

 In Dickens' *Christmas Carol* the miserly Scrooge is confronted by the ghost of his dead partner, Jacob Marley, who in life had been as stingy as Scrooge. Now from the realm of shadow Marley's ghost tries to save his partner from his own fate. Scrooge seeks to comfort him by saying, “*But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.*” Whereupon Marley’s ghost cries: “*Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.*”

 Too late he had discovered God’s priorities.

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