



TIME and JUDGMENT

Who is a wise man?

Solomon, the revered sage posed the question, “Who is as the wise man?” (Ecc 8:1). He did this to introduce the essential principle of wisdom – which he then stated in answer to his own question. “A wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment” (Ecc 8:5). He then went on to declare why a wise man considers these two matters. It is “because to every purpose there is time and judgment” (Ecc 8:6). When viewed in the light of our sinful position and nature before God, his answer embraces a temporal and a spiritual warning.

A wise man acknowledges that *time is passing* and that its *end is uncertain*. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pr 27:1). We expect a tomorrow and entertain procrastination to our eternal peril. Another has well said – procrastination is the “thief of time.” Darling buds, as well as honored full-blooms lie buried in our graveyards, testifying that death is not a respecter of persons.

A wise man also acknowledges that divine judgment *has been passed* and that *its end is certain*. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). May we take solemn note! Judgment because of our sin *has* been passed. The compassionate Son of God declared it to be so for all who do not know Him as their personal Saviour. “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18). God has “appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). So He “now commands all men everywhere to repent” – to acknowledge while they can, that they are under divine judgment because of their sin in position and practice, and turn in faith to Christ as their Lord and Saviour (Acts 17:30).

“I have no time”

There are many instances in the Bible illustrating how unwise it is to ignore time and judgment. We will consider four of these. The first is in Luke 14 – the Lord’s parable concerning an invitation. A man prepared a great supper and invited many to come. They all began to make excuses – one had bought land and had to survey it; another had bought oxen and had to prove them; and another had just married and so he could not come. It all came down to one thing – they were too busy – they **had no time**. As a result, the man declared, “none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (v 24). Many today are just too busy to consider the solemn matters concerning time and judgment. Many scoff, “Where is the promise of his coming [judgment]?” (2 Pet 3:4)? God’s gracious invitation to partake of His salvation is still open. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). There is a time coming however, when it will close. “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Gen 6:3). “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecc 3:1). If you have not yet accepted God’s invitation for salvation, may you do so without delay. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Simply come, “for all things are ready” – Christ’s shed blood has secured it!

“It is an inconvenient time”

The second instance is found in Acts 24. The apostle Paul was before Felix, the governor of Judea. He was called to explain his faith in Christ. The substance of his account is in verse 25. Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Doubtless Paul informed Felix that in the eyes of a righteous God he was a sinner and under God’s judgment. This, it appears, caused considerable anxiety in the heart of Felix, because we read that “Felix trembled.” But how sad! What Paul had said, concerned Felix to the point of trembling – but there is no record of his conversion. Instead we read of his procrastination – Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (v 25). What Paul had put before Felix was, as far as Felix was concerned, in reality an “inconvenient truth.” It “rattled his cage” we might say, but it never penetrated his heart causing him to be convicted of his sin and judgment before God. There are many today who respond to the gospel as Felix did. They are concerned for a time but convince themselves that the matter can be deferred. Tragically, many run out of time and never have another chance to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. A wise man considers both time and judgment.

Then there are some who believe that they will have a second chance after they die – resting in notions such as purgatory, baptism or prayers for the dead. A biblical denial of these deceptive doctrines is beyond our immediate purpose. Instead we will present an instructive parable spoken by the Lord. It is found in Luke 16.

“19. There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores...22. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23. And in hell [Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 27. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28. For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31).

“I have a second time”

There are a number of vital things to be gleaned from this parable; the following are just a few. The rich man dies and is consigned to Hades. Notice first that he is conscious, which refutes the idea of “soul sleep” or “annihilation.” Second, there can be no help from the saved beggar or Abraham for the rich man, dismissing the idea that departed saints can intercede for others. An unbridgeable gulf separates them. The rich man, while he was alive had one hope. That was to hear Moses and the prophets and of whom they spoke – Jesus Christ, who “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). This, too, was the only hope for his living brethren. It is the only hope for you and I. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). We can see the wisdom behind Paul’s words to young Timothy. “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Third, and most importantly, we learn from this parable that there is **no second time** – no chance for salvation after death. How solemn! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). A wise man considers both time and judgment.

“Just in time”

Lastly, we have the compelling threefold lesson regarding time and judgment seen at Calvary. First, there was the impenitent thief whose heart was full of rebuke and who *died in his sin under its eternal penalty*. He was unwise in regard to time and judgment: he **ran out of time**. He is lost for all eternity; a companion of the rich man of Luke 16. Second, there was another thief. Realizing death was imminent he repented and acknowledged Christ as his Lord and Saviour. “And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Immediately the Lord answered, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). How blessed! “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn 6:37). The penitent thief measured his time and acknowledged divine judgment. He *died to sin, escaping its eternal penalty*. In simple faith he found eternal life in Christ – **just in time**. His repentance, though timely, must not however encourage us to rest our hope in a death-bed confession. “Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee” (Job 36:18). Third, at Calvary, the Son of God was crucified on the centre cross. In His matchless love, God sent His Son to die and shed His blood as a ransom for sinners. He *died for sin, providing the way of escape from its eternal penalty*. So we have the grand truth, that “when we were yet without strength, in **due time** Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). This is the glorious testimony of the Christian and of the penitent thief. We trust it will be yours as well by accepting Christ as your Saviour in simple faith! “I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work” (Ecc 3:17).

“In due time Christ died for the ungodly”

“Time is gliding swiftly by,
Death and judgment draweth nigh,
To the arms of Jesus fly,
Be in time.” (Wm. J Kirkpatrick)