

GONE. GONE FOREVER

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A SERMON
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“And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.”
1 Kings 20:40

THE parable which the prophet acted before Ahab was simple and natural. A soldier in the heat of the fight was charged by an officer to take care of an important prisoner. “Keep this man,” said he, “for if thou suffer him to escape thy life shall answer for it, or thou shalt pay a talent of silver.” The soldier’s one business from that moment was to look after his captive. He had received command to do so from his superior officer, and his first and last work was to see that the prisoner was kept safely.

However, he had other things to do belonging to himself, his family, and the like, and turning his thoughts in that direction, he forgot his charge, and the prisoner very naturally seized the opportunity to escape. And so the soldier exclaims, “While I was busy here and there, he was gone.”

The neglectful guard had no cause to be surprised that such was the case, but he was not prepared to bear the penalty, and therefore he came before the king to ask that he might be pardoned for his neglect. The king replied at once, “You have stated your case, and decided it. Your own carelessness has lost us the captive and you know the penalty.”

This story was originally told in order to touch the conscience of King Ahab, who had allowed Benhadad, king of Syria, to escape when providence had put the cruel monarch into his hand on purpose that he might receive his doom. Ahab is no more, but this Scripture is not, therefore, like a spent shell—there is truth and power in it yet. Its teaching is applicable to us also. Ahab is gone to his account, and the dogs have licked his blood. We may forget the guilty monarch and incline our own ears and hearts to hear what the parable may have to do with us.

We, too, have received a charge, have we neglected it? We have had time and opportunity within our keeping, have they gone? Let us search and see whether it is so or not. When the rebellious king had received this warning he went to his house heavy and displeased, and it may be that the subject of this morning will be far from agreeable to many, yet will it be well for their souls if they become heavy with the burden of repentance and displeased with themselves.

Oh that the Spirit of God would speak home to all our hearts, and save us from a course of life which may cost us a thousand bitter regrets.

I. And first let us think of THE OBLIGATION which the text suggests, that we may solemnly own that we are under a higher obligation still.

This man being engaged in warfare, was bound to obey the orders of his superior officer. That officer put into his custody a prisoner, saying, “keep this man,” and from that moment he was under an obligation from which nothing could free him. It is a law of discipline in the army that what a man is bidden to do by legitimate authority he must do, and therefore the man’s chief business was to detain his captive safely till he could hand him over to the capturer.

Dear friends, you and I are under personal obligation from the moment of our entrance upon years of responsibility, and that obligation is this—to serve, and honor, and glorify God. Every man is bound to serve his Creator, and live to His glory. That this is most just is clear as the sun in the heavens, if we will but think a little.

Alas, it is a subject upon which some men have never thought, nor will they care to think. Of themselves they have been more than a little thoughtful. Their duty to their neighbor they have also in

some measure considered. But their obligation to God does not seem even to have crossed their minds. They forget God and live, in fact, as if there were none, or as if they were not bound to serve Him.

The practical language of their life is like that of Pharaoh, “Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice?” They would not be unjust to a neighbor, but they practice constant injustice towards their Maker. The prophet asks, “Will a man rob God?” But alas, thousands of lives are one long robbery of the Almighty, one perpetual disregard of claims founded upon eternal justice.

That we are bound to serve God is clear, because *we derive our being from Him*. We should never have existed if it had not been for His power. We would cease to exist at this instant if that power did not sustain us in being. Surely that existence which was originated by God should be spent to His honor, and the being which hourly depends upon Him should be used for His glory.

Children owe obedience to their parents, and much more do creatures owe a debt to their Creator—that debt is a consecrated life, a debt which is always due since the life is daily being maintained by fresh goings forth of divine power.

It was for this end that the Almighty made us, and for nothing short of this, that we might glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When a man fashions a vessel or a tool, it is that it may answer the purpose for which he designed it, and if it does not answer his design he casts it away. What man will keep a horse or a cow if it yield him no benefit? And if a dog never owned you as its master, who among you would long call it your own? God has made us that we may glorify Him, and if we do not honor Him we miss the end and object of our being.

I care not what you do nor what you are, though you should be owners of a score of counties, if you love not God your soul is poor and degraded. Though men should set you on a column high in the air and account you a hero, if you have not lived for God you have lived in vain. As the vine which yields no cluster is useless, so is a man who has not honored God. As an arrow which falls short of the mark, as a fig tree which yields no figs, as a candle which smokes but yields no light, as a cloud without rain and a well without water, is a man who has not served the Lord. He has led a wasted life—a life to which the flower and glory of existence are lacking. Call it not life at all, but write it down as animated death.

To the service of God a thousand voices call us all. I know not where we can walk without hearing those impressive calls. Lift up your eyes to the midnight sky and every star exclaims, “We shine to JEHOVAH’s praise, what doest thou?” Cast your eye upon the fields bespangled with living jewels, for each flower whispers, “I bloom to the great Maker’s praise, what doest thou?” Listen to the birds, whose tuneful choirs are occupied with the praises of the Lord, and they inquire of you, “Have you no music for the Lord?”

The very dust that is borne in the gale, moves according to His laws, and asks us why we disobey. Everything above, beneath, around, majestic or minute, if we will but listen, saith to us, “We are all the servants of the Most High, why wait *you* not within His courts?”

Man’s obligation to serve his Maker is even greater than that of any other of the creatures around him, for he is the Maker’s masterpiece in which divine skill is seen to perfection. His body was curiously wrought by the fingers of infinite wisdom, and as for his soul, it is of the loftiest order of created things, and is akin to angels, so that if any created being ought to serve the Lord by whom it lives, man is that creature.

Moreover, standing first in the scale of visible beings, having dominion over all the works of God’s hands, man should be first in loyalty to the great King. To him the laborious ox bows its willing neck. For him the horse foregoes the wild freedom of the plains. To him the sheep yield their fleece for his covering, and their flesh for his food. For him the fish leap from the stream and the birds drop from the wing. He has dominion over all the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, and reigns as God’s vicegerent over the brute creation. All this, and yet this exalted being forgets the sovereign who has lent him His authority and denies the homage which is due to his liege Lord.

Brethren, it ought not so to be. Gratitude exclaims against the revolt of a being so highly favored.

A great argument for our obligation to glorify God is found in the fact that *in this service men find their highest honor and their truest happiness*. To serve some beings would be degrading, to be the vessel of the devil is to bring upon yourself disgrace and sorrow, but to serve the Lord is more honorable than to wear a prince's ermine, and as for happiness the angels find it heaven and redeemed spirits own it to be their bliss, while those on earth who most fully do the will of the Lord confess themselves to be the happiest of men. It is a seraph's glory that he gives glory to God, and there we must find ours.

Friend, you and I are so constituted that we never can be right except we run in the groove of obedience to the great First Cause. This is the orbit in which we can safely move, all else is chaos and leads to misery. Wander out of the way of God's honor and you stumble among the dark mountains, and lose yourself amidst tangled briars and piercing thorns.

If, then, it is man's health, happiness, and honor that he should serve God, surely his duty lies in that direction, and it is the height of folly to neglect it.

Let this, also, never be far from our memories, that *there is a day coming when we must, all of us give an account of our lives, and the account will be based upon this inquiry—How have we served and glorified God?* In that tremendous day, whose awful splendor shall cause the pomp of kingdoms to turn pale, the one great question will be, "How have you lived in reference to God?"

Remember our Lord's own description of the judgment. He makes service rendered to Himself the test and touchstone, "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink." What ye did for Him, or what ye did not do for Him, will be the hinge on which judgment shall turn. True, your actions towards your fellow men enter into that account, for the clothing of the naked and the giving of drink to the thirsty are introduced as evidence of service done to the Lord, but then these deeds were done as unto Him, and were part and parcel of that service which is His due.

If there be nothing done unto the Lord, if to the Lord no reverence be rendered, if to the Lord no love be returned, then can there be no sentence for you but this, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

I would leave this point, but I think I hear the inquiry—"Are we, then, to leave our business, shut up our shops, forsake our families, betake ourselves to solitude and spend our time in prayer and devotion?" I said not so. I have not even hinted at such folly. I have said that you are under obligation to serve God—surely this does not imply that you are to avoid that service? When the Lord bade Jonah serve Him in Nineveh, was it not flat rebellion which led him to flee into Tarshish? Certainly it was not the way to keep the command.

In your own callings, where God has placed you, you are to glorify Him. It is not fighting a battle for a man to run out of it, to avoid the contest and the trial which comes out of it, yet that is what it comes to when a man gets to a monastery or a woman to a nunnery. Thus duty is shirked under the pretence of more easily fulfilling it, and God's glory is sacrificed under the plea of promoting it.

Did He make men to be immured in cells, or women to be buried alive in religious prisons? 'Tis an ill use to which to put an intelligent being, and a sheer waste of the Creator's revenues. You cannot win the battle by quitting the field. Stand where your Captain has placed you, fight in His strength, and endure till victory crowns you.

There is a way of glorifying God in your present position whatever it may be. A merchant or a working man, a mistress or a nurse girl, a king or a pauper, has each one a work to do. We are, or ought to be, all servants in the one great house, doing this or that as the Master appoints, and all equally glorifying God as His grace enables us. Our service to God lies not out of the way of daily life, but in it. See, then, that you be diligent therein.

"But are we not to serve our fellow men?" Who said you were not? There are two tables of the law. The first contains the precepts towards God, the second the commands towards men, but they are both God's law. He that does good to his fellow men for God's *sake* is serving God. In fact this is one of the noblest ways in which men serve God when they pursue the good of their fellows that thereby God may be glorified. Still, man is not our master, but our fellow servant.

The Lord has an undivided right to us, to every motion of our body, to every faculty of our mind, and every capacity of our entire nature. For “it is he that made us, and not we ourselves, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.”

II. Secondly, our text contains A CONFESSION, “*He was gone.*”

The man was under obligation to take care of his prisoner, but he had to confess that he was gone. I anxiously desire to deal with your consciences as I will deal with my own, while I inquire, how many of us have to confess that though under obligations to God we have not fulfilled them? Alas, it may be said of many an opportunity for glorifying God, “It is gone.”

First, we have lost many opportunities for serving God which arise out of the periods of life. We were children, and when the little child brings Jesus its “Hosanna,” its early praises are very sweet to Him. Ah, boys, below here, and children all around me, 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. Oh, how lovely would I have looked in Christ’s eye if I had served Him as a child, but it is too late now, the bud is withered, the early dew is dried up, and my morning sacrifice is not offered.”

As for you, young men, it is a great thing to serve God in your youth. There is a fire and vigor, and elasticity of life about our earliest manhood which we lose when we arrive at the prime of life, and Jesus deserves to have us at our very best. It is a glorious thing to give our brightest days to Jesus. But I know there are some here who have already to look back upon early manhood wasted and gone, gone forever.

Then we come upon another period, in which we become heads of households, with a family of children about us, here are golden opportunities. The young trees can be bent, the pliant branches can be inclined this way or that while yet young, but they soon grow beyond our culture.

Ah, men and women who have lived without God all the time that you have had children under your roof, and now they have all grown up without the fear of God, with what grief must you confess your opportunities gone from your grasp! You cannot influence your children now, that opportunity is gone past recall. You cannot talk to your son now, as you might have done when you could take the fair-haired boy upon your knee and kiss him and tell him of Jesus. Your daughter is a mother herself now, and you cannot speak to her as you could have done when she was a child at home. Those days of instruction and persuasion are *gone*.

Perhaps I address some who were once in business and had considerable influence over a large number of workmen and others, but they have now retired from active engagements, for the infirmities of age have come upon them. It is a sad fact if upon looking back they are obliged to say, “A thousand chances of doing good are gone. I am out of that condition and position which afforded me such means of usefulness, and now I mourn that I did not avail myself of them.”

Ah, my dear friend, it is sad for you if you have to look back so far, and to own that your talent was buried in the earth, and brought in no interest for Jesus.

Another form of regret may arise out of the changes of our circumstances. 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.”

Another may have possessed considerable ability of mind, but through sickness or declining vigor he may not be able now to do what he once did. It is grievous if he has to say, “Oh that I had spoken for Christ when I could speak. Oh that I had used my brain for Him while yet my thought was clear and my perception quick. But now, alas, my capacity is gone.” To rue a change and to remember that you neglected to use your opportunity must be very painful, and yet it falls to the lot of very many. He is poor indeed who once was rich and used not his wealth for God, and he is fallen indeed who, when he stood aloft, used not his standing for his Maker’s praise.

Remember also, dear friends—I must ask each one to take it home to himself—the time which has not been employed in Christ’s service is gone. If you have not lived unto God, how many years have

now gone with some of you! I pray you now to number the years which have rolled away. Your candle is burning low in the socket, and as yet your work is not begun! Time is going and eternity approaching. Will you never awake?

As time has gone so also have many persons gone to whom we might have been useful. Thousands have passed away during our short span of life. Have you not had to say, "I ought to have spoken to So-and-so, who was in my employment, but he died without hope before I had warned him, and he is gone where no word of mine can ever reach him!"

Oh, how many have passed away since I first began to address this audience, and if I could charge myself with unfaithfulness to you in preaching the Word, how should I have to regret each funeral, and to remember each tomb and say, "There lies one for whom I can render no acceptable account at last, for I have been unfaithful, and kept back the truth." I thank God that I have not this to burden my heart. Do not let it be so with any of you.

Sometimes, however, the confession of the thing gone concerns noble ideas and resolves. You had great conceptions, and if they had but been embodied in action something good would have come of them. But where are the ideas now? Were they not smothered in their birth? You resolved to do great things, the plan was thoroughly arranged, and your whole heart was eager to carry it out, but delay chilled the goodly purpose till it died of cold, and they lie buried in forgetfulness.

You dreamed well, but there you stopped. As for actual work for the Lord, you had other fish to fry, and therefore you cast out your net for him. You suffered the season for activity to go by, and so your excellent ideas and resolutions melted into thin air and they are gone.

Ay, and there may be some here from whom a vast wealth of opportunity has passed away. They have been blessed with great means and large substance, and if these had been laid out for Jesus Christ year after year many a lagging agency would have been quickened, and many a holy enterprise which has had to be suspended for lack of means might have gone on gloriously.

They could have supplied the sinews of war in the form of money, but they have stinted the Lord's exchequer and kept the work small and struggling. Their gold and their silver, according to their profession, belonged to Christ, but they have kept them to themselves. What account will they render for this? I am sure that I cannot tell! Let them look to it.

Others have possessed mental endowments. They were men of clear thought, and fluent speech, and they could have led the way in many good works, but they have kept in the rear and lived in indolence. How will they answer for this? I would not be in their places for the world. O my God, if I had a hair upon my head that I had not consecrated to You, I could not dare to live, lest I be found at heart a traitor to You.

Yet are there hundreds, and I must not judge them, their Master will judge them at the last, who call themselves Christians, whose consecration does not go so deep but what you might peel it off with your fingernail. Scratch a Russian, they say, and you find a Tartar. And so there are some professors who need but a slight brushing and you will find unconsecrated self beneath. They have not given themselves up in deed and of a truth unto God.

It cuts me to the quick to remember that I have met with men whose possessions have amounted to millions, who have given me an earnest grip of the hand, and thanked me for the Gospel I have preached, and expressed the deepest interest in the Lord's work and yet they have known its needs and have given nothing to carry it on, and have even passed into eternity and left nothing of their substance to assist the cause which they professed to love.

The smallness of the gifts of some religious rich men staggers me beyond expression, I know not how to comprehend them. Are they hypocrites? Or do they misunderstand their position? He who does great wonders knows how to save. But I remember also that He whose fan is in His hand and who will thoroughly purge His floor, knows how to judge between hypocritical profession and real consecration to His service.

That barren fig tree of which we read this morning, and that servant who wrapped his talent in a napkin—those parables mean something, and they mean much to any of you who have large talents committed to your trust, but who are doing next to nothing in your Master's service.

Worst of all, brethren, what will be the cry of a man when he comes to die, when, dying, he looks back upon his whole life and says, "I was busy here and there, and I did nothing for Christ, my life is gone"? And then he looks into the dim future, and seeing no brightness there, he cries, "Woe is me, my soul is lost, I tried to gain the world and I have lost my soul. Everything that I did with so much toil and effort now turns out to be mere trifling, for my soul is lost forever, and all is lost forever. Would God I had never been born, for what a dreadful thing to have been born and to have lived and missed the object for which I was created!"

May this dreadful ruin of soul, life, and everything never happen to any one of you, *and yet it may.*

III. Thirdly, we have before us THE EXCUSE which was made—"As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

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. His sole duty was to watch his prisoner, and the one great business of every man here below is to glorify God. "But have we no secular business?" say you. I have already told you that you are to glorify God in your daily business, and by that business.

You will not need to sell a yard of calico or a pound of sugar the less because you seek God's glory! You will not, probably, need to spend five minutes less in your worldly business in order to serve God. Consecrate all that you do by doing it unto Him, and then do as much as you like. It may make a difference in your mode of doing it—it should do so where that mode is not what it should be, but you can serve God in and by your common calling. Religion does not interfere with work, but sanctifies it. So, being busy is no excuse for being ungodly.

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. If he had said, "I was sick and could not stir. I had lost an arm and could not hold the prisoner. I was smitten with a fit and was unconscious"—there would have been some excuse. But no, he was "busy here and there," and if he could do one thing he could have done another. If he had ability enough in one way, why did he not turn that ability to use in the way which his duty required?

Then, again, what he had done was evidently done to please himself. He was "busy here and there." Who told him to be "busy here and there"? He set himself work which was not cut out for him. Very well, then he was serving himself instead of his Master, and robbing his Lord of his time and ability in order to give it to himself, making himself his own king and casting off his allegiance to the Lord.

Still he says he was "busy." Now let us see what he has accomplished. Here is a man who has been busy all his life and what has he done? Done? He has made a good deal of money. That is something, is it not? He has collected a great store—*for himself.*

Not having served the Lord, but having lived to make money, he has evidently thought more of gold than of God, and so he has been an idolater, and has thought less of his Maker than of his own pocket. He has despised the Lord and preferred his own gain. That is clear, and what is this but to rebel against the Most High?

What a poor thing hoarding money is! When you are dead what can your wealth do for you? Yes, those horses will have more plumes on their heads, and there will be more men in shabby black to get you off the empty hearse and drink at the public house on the way home from your funeral. No doubt there will be more tomfoolery over you than there would have been if you had been a poor villager and had been decently borne on men's shoulders to your grave. And there will be more quarrelling among your heirs, and perhaps a longer lawsuit over your property and more pickings for the lawyers than there would have been had you heaped up less of the yellow earth.

To have it said, “he died worth an immense sum,” is the consummation in a great number of cases, but what is that? What is the dead man the better for having been a millionaire? To use money rightly is a pleasure, but to die and leave it all unused is utter misery. To heap it up for others to squander is poor work, I had as soon break stones on the road. To be the devil’s rake that another may be his pitchfork is a poor ambition. Yet this is the story of many men. They are busy here and there for selfish ends, and all hope of serving God is gone.

I hear one of you say, “My departed friend was not busy about wealth, he sought the love and honor of his fellow citizens, and aspired to honor.” Yes, but if he served not the Lord it is clear that he loved the praise of men better than the praise of God, and what good can that do him now that he lies in the cold grave? There was a record of his name in *The Times* and many people said, “Another eminent man is gone,” but what of that? What is honor when a man lies stark and stiff within his winding sheet?

Here is another man who says, “But I have lived for learning, I have sought after knowledge, as for hidden treasure.” But my dear friend, if you have not lived for God, you have thought every knowledge worth having but the knowledge of the Most High. You have arranged and classified the different orders of flies and beetles, or put into scientific order the flowers of the field and the stars of the firmament. I do not decry your knowledge, on the contrary, I value it, but how is it that you neglect its highest branch? Science of every kind may wisely be sought after, but not at the expense of serving God.

The naturalist can readily serve God in his researches and discoveries, every science can be used for God’s glory. But if the science is pursued apart from the glory of God, it is as insulting as if a man should say, “Great God, Thy creatures I wish to understand, but as for Thyself, I care not to know or honor Thee.” Is not this a grievous fault?

What has the man who has forgotten his God been doing? Well, some men cannot give half so good an account as I have already given. Doing? Why, some of them have lived for mere pleasure-seeking and time-killing. Too many in this luxurious city are only clothes-horses for tailors and milliners, or shall I call them patent digesters, dissolving daily great stores of good meat and drink, and so on. Their one question in the morning is, “How shall we amuse ourselves today?”

A rat lives a better life than the mere gentleman about town who has nothing to do. At least it does not consume so much, and having no conscience it has not so much to answer for. This creature, six feet in his boots, has not the sixth part of anything good to recommend him. His soul seems to be of no use to him but to act as salt to keep his body from corrupting.

It is an awful thing to be a man and yet no man. There are plenty of such about. For all the good they are you might cut better men out of brown paper, they are all sham and show. Alas, this is true of women as well as men, for the Scripture saith, “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she lives.”

But what are some busy about? Alas, they are even worse than the poor fools I have just now described, for their pleasure is found in vice. They are busy in indulging their vile passions, and eternity alone will reveal the characters ruined and the lives blasted by their wickedness. They are gentlemen all the same, you know, and having plenty of money, they can marry any man’s daughter. Shame that it should be so. Ah me, what a wretched thing it will be to them to have lived a rotten life, and to have been busy only about how to indulge base passions at the cost of others’ souls.

Some who think themselves a better sort have lived to criticize others, to find fault with the way in which earnest men are serving God, to tell how things ought to be done though they never do anything themselves, to show the mistakes of the virtuous and successful, and to weave plans and projects which they never carry out.

They look into the future and see what is going to happen and into the past and see what ought to have happened, and to spin fine theories and I know not what—where can be the good of all this? And yet in such things many a life has been frittered away, laboriously wasted in scheming how to do nothing at all. Oh, may that never be your lot, to be busy here and there, and thus to let life leak away while none of its work is done.

Oh that I could speak with a voice which could reach every heart. I grudged the smiles which I caused just now, but I only created them that they might help me to thrust graver thoughts into your minds.

Brethren, is it not a sad thing to have neglected that which is evidently the main business of life? If I am God's creature, I must have been meant to serve God, and if I have not served Him, even as a creature, I have not done what I was meant for. But if I profess to be a Christian, then the thing assumes a more solemn form.

Have I professed to be bought with Jesus' blood, and not to be my own, and have I lived as if I were my own? I profess to be filled with the Spirit of God by being regenerate—have I lived like one who has been born again? If I have been baptized upon a profession of my faith, I gave myself up to be buried in the water professing that I was dead to the world—have I been dead to the world? I said that I was going to live in newness of life as one risen from the dead—have I so lived?

Oh, professing Christian men, have you been true to your professions, or have those professions been only lies? Conscience, answer me, I charge you! O Spirit of God, quicken conscience in everyone here present, so that none may be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

To serve God is the only thing worth living for, and when we lie upon the sick bed and begin to look into the future we judge it to be so. It makes a good man greedy to serve God when he thinks that his life will soon be over. He condemns himself for every wasted hour and laments that his every faculty has not been spurred to the uttermost in the service of Him who bought him with His blood.

I never yet heard regrets from dying men that they had done too much for Christ, or lived too earnestly for Him, or won too many souls, or given too much of their substance to the cause of God, but the regrets all lie the other way, God save us from them for His mercy's sake.

IV. Fourthly, there remains THE UNALTERABLE FACT, "While I was busy here and there, he was gone."

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. I want you all to remember this morning that if any portion of life has not been spent in God's service *it is gone*. Time past is gone. You can never have it back again, not even the last moment which just now glided by.

Go, gather the morning dew which has been exhaled by the sun. Go, gather the clouds which yesterday poured forth their rain. Go, gather the sunbeams which fell upon the earth last summer. But if you could accomplish that task, do not even then hope to recover the time which has departed. It is gone, omnipotence itself cannot give it back to you.

With the time, remember, your life has gone, and there is no living it over again. We have, sometimes been foolish enough to say, "Oh could I live my life over again!" Why say it? You cannot live it over again, it is gone. Whatever omnipotent grace may do, it cannot alter your past life. It will be eternally what you have made it. When the moments were like hot wax you set your seal on them, and the seal is there forever.

What your life has been the truth reports it forever. Throughout eternity it will not be possible for you to change the complexion of a single moment in which you have lived. You cannot alter the past, though you should forever sigh. "Oh, that I had availed myself of that opportunity! Oh, that I had then been self-denying! Oh, that I had abounded in work which glorified Christ." You cannot recall an act, nor unsay a word, nor revoke a negligence.

Remember also, that future diligence will not be able to recover wasted time. You may hold your next captive, but you cannot get back the prisoners that have already escaped you. Young man, you are not yet five-and-twenty, and there is a grand time before you. Use it, use it well. But you cannot get back the years between fifteen and twenty-five. They are gone, and if misspent are gone forever.

A man of sixty may yet do something, but what of the long wasted years already past? I suppose Luther was past forty before he began his life work, and yet he accomplished a splendid result for Christ. But even Luther could not get back his years of unregeneracy and superstition.

Time is on the wing, use it now. Do not loiter, for you can pluck no feather from the wing of time to make it loiter too. It flies, and if you would use it, use it now. Arouse yourself and sleep no longer. If you would indeed be true to God who made you and to Christ who bought you with His precious blood, use yourself now to the fullest conceivable extent for the glory of your Lord and Master.

How shall we conclude? This sermon sweeps like a rough north wind right through us all. What shall we do? I will suggest to you what to do. Let us all fly to Jesus, who can forgive the guilt of the past. Is there one man or woman here who can say, "I have nothing to confess. No negligence can be laid at my door"? I must plainly declare that I am not one of such. I have much to mourn over.

Friends, I will be chief mourner, and I will lead the way to the cross. There let us bemoan ourselves before our Savior. His precious blood can make us clean. We will look to it. We will trust in its merits. We are clean if we believe in Him. That Righteousness of His, without a flaw, can cover us. Let us put it on and stand accepted in the Beloved.

When this is done, what next? Let us come to Christ again and ask Him to heal us of the lethargy of disobedience which has taken hold on us so long. Some of us have forgotten our God, we have lived as if we were under no obligations to Him, and even those of us who have been quickened by His Holy Spirit have not served Him as we should have done. Lord, let Thy precious blood heal us now, that we may think only of God and of His glory, and may henceforth live for Him alone.

Once more, let us come to Christ that we may feel new motives and receive new inspirations. Have you never heard of men who have had a mighty turn? They have met with something which has given a life-long twist to their nature, so that they are new men. You knew them very well one day, but when you met them the next time you scarcely recognized them. They had become so changed and so absorbed by a subject of which they began to talk at once, to you. You thought them singular, but I wish we were each one singular in some such way.

I would that my Lord Jesus Christ would meet every one of you this afternoon and reveal Himself to you. I do not ask that you should see Him with your bodily eyes, but I wish your spiritual eyes might be opened that you might see Him, and that He would show you His hands, and His feet, and His side, and say to you, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and I have given Myself for thee. Behold, I lay upon you these, My pierced hands. You are Mine and therefore I charge you live as one that is alive from the dead. Henceforth as surely as My Father sent Me into the world so send I you."

May this happen to each one of us and then we shall lead new lives, and those lives will be so much to God's glory, that men will take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus in some new and strange way, and have learned of Him. God bless you to this end, for Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
LUKE 13:1-9; LUKE 19:12-26; 1 KINGS 20:35-43**

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—196, 645, 769

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.