

Most of you are familiar with that time-honored story about a board meeting that Satan once called in hell. At this meeting Satan put this question to his senior advisors: ***“We need to develop a new strategy for causing havoc upon earth. Do you have any suggestions for a new means of reaching human beings for our side?”***

One advisor suggested, ***“Tell them there is no heaven.”*** Another said, ***“Tell them there is no hell.”*** **But the winning suggestion was judged to be much more effective: “Tell them there is no hurry.”**

Could I suggest to you this morning that in the most important matters of life, there is indeed a very big hurry?

In today’s lesson Jesus encounters a man and says to him, **“Follow me.”** But this man replies, **“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”**

Interesting response. Here’s what we don’t know about this man. Had his father just died? Certainly, if so, he did need to see to this immediately. Or did his father have a lingering illness that would claim him sometime in the near future? Or was he simply saying that he had responsibility for his father and that someday, sometime his father would die, so he had better stay home until that day came?

Whatever the answer, Jesus said to him, ***“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”***

Still another said to him, ***“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”***

Again, it sounds like a sensible response, but remember, Jesus could see into people’s hearts. **He knew when someone had a legitimate concern or was simply using a delay tactic.**

Jesus replied, *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

It may trouble you that Jesus treated these men who simply indicated they needed more time so harshly. But **Jesus knew that in the truly important things of life there is a need for urgency.** Some things simply cannot be put off without the threat of dire consequences.

Consider, for example, the simple act of expressing our love for the people closest to us. Expressing such love simply cannot be put off.

“Dear Abby,” was once asked what letter was requested the most for reprinting by her readers:

“Dear Abby: I am the most heartbroken person on the earth. I always found time to go everywhere else but to see my [aging] parents. They sat at home, loving me just the same. Now when I go to visit their graves . . . I wonder if God will ever forgive me for the heartaches I must have caused them . . .” Can you feel the regret in those words?

Some things simply can’t be put off, like expressing love for someone special.

You may be familiar with that literary giant of another generation, Samuel Johnson. Johnson’s father was a book seller--selling books from town to town--during Johnson’s boyhood. Once when his father was very ill, tired and worn down by his constant struggle to support his family, he asked young Samuel to go to a certain market to take his place. **Young Samuel--like many of us in our youth, too self-involved--smugly refused to do so.** His father dressed and made the arduous trip himself--never saying a word of reproach to his son. Fifty years later, the renowned and prosperous Samuel Johnson, now his name a household word throughout England, stood bareheaded for hours close by a spot near that same market where once his father’s bookstall had stood. People stared at him as he stood there almost motionless in the midst of wind and rain. He was remembering that time long ago when his aging father asked of him a small favor and he had smugly refused. **Can any of you identify with his great regret?**

A great theologian, a man who has inspired millions of Christians, confessed sometime back that he had been a terrible failure with his own children. ***“How I wish,” he laments, “that when my children were young, I had spent less time with my books and more time with my family.”***

There is an urgency about love, is there not? Children grow up, oh, so quickly. Time takes its toll in the aging process. There are some persons whose love we treasure today who might not be with us tomorrow or next week or next year. If we are going to take time to show our love for one another, **WE HAD BETTER DO IT NOW!!**
There is an urgency about the really important things in life.

One of those important things is demonstrating our affection for people we love.

You may know the story about the very bashful young man who was hesitant about demonstrating his affection for his sweetheart. *“Oh, but that I were an octopus,”* he said one night, *“that I might wrap all eight arms around you.”* His impatient sweetheart replied, *“Don’t worry about having eight arms. Just make better use of the two arms God gave you.”*

SOMETIMES THERE IS AN URGENCY ABOUT DEMONSTRATING LOVE.

There can sometimes be an even greater urgency about ALTERING OUR LIFESTYLE. There comes a time when a person must change his or her way of living . . . AND DO IT NOW!!

Daily we are confronted with tragic stories of the inroads that drug abuse has made into our society. Ball players, movie stars, children of famous political families as well as ordinary citizens by the thousands are having their lives destroyed by this modern plague. How low does a person have to sink--how much money does he have to spend--how many people does he have to hurt--before he says, “Whoa--this is it--I’ve got to get control of my life?”

There comes a time when fighting a destructive habit or a debilitating weakness when you must say, “I must stop now or it will be too late.”

There is a story of a man who waited until it was too late to make a change in his life. His name was Judas. I wonder if Judas ever intended for Christ to die. I wonder if he ever thought it would go that far. Perhaps Jesus had said something that hurt or offended Judas. That happens sometimes in church. Sometimes we might make the most innocent comment to someone and they may misconstrue it, and quite unintentionally we’ve lost a friend. Maybe Judas felt rejected by the other disciples. Perhaps it troubled him that he was not part of that small circle of disciples closest to Jesus--Peter, James and John--who were always there on significant occasions in Jesus’ life. Could it have been simple jealousy? **“I’ll show them.”** Judas may have said to himself. But it may be that he never intended for Jesus to be crucified.

“I have betrayed innocent blood,” he cried out to the temple authorities as he tried to return their money. *“What is that to us?”* they said with a sneer as they turned their backs on him. **Suddenly Judas realized that it was too late, he made the wrong CHOICE, and he went and HANGED HIMSELF...AND WHAT ABOUT YOU???**

It is an awful thing to wake up and realize IT IS TOO LATE--too late to save your marriage--too late, you’re pregnant--too late, you’re addicted--too late, you’ve been caught, you’ve brought disgrace to your family and friends--too late, you’ve had that tragic accident. Do you see there is sometimes an urgency about changing the way you are living? Stop, for God’s sake, stop, an inner voice may be saying to you this morning, before it is too late.

There is built into life an important URGENCY when it comes to the things that really matter. **Such it is most crucially with our relationship with Christ.**

I challenge you to find one place in the New Testament where Jesus told anybody to “go home, think it over, and get back to me tomorrow.” It simply doesn’t happen. We read in Matthew 4 that Jesus came to Simon and Andrew and James and John at their fishing boats beside the Sea of Galilee and said to them, **“FOLLOW ME”** and immediately they left their nets and followed him.

In today’s lesson Jesus encounters two men who want to delay making a commitment to him, and Jesus rebukes them. Jesus’ invitation is always an invitation to **DO IT NOW!!** **PROCRASTINATION is a major problem in many people’s lives.** It complicates our lives in so many ways. For some of us it is a major block to success in our work, and even in our personal relationships. It may even keep us from enjoying life abundant.

When Jesus calls us, he says, DO IT TODAY!!! WHY?? There are three reasons he calls us with such URGENCY. The first has to do with our nature. We are creatures of habit. The older we get the harder it is to change. The road to hell really is paved with good intentions. We may have good intentions but if we do not act on them now, chances are we never will. That is our nature.

Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar decided to go on a diet and reduce his weight from 202 pounds to 165 pounds. At the same time, he was writing a book titled, *See You at the Top.* In the book, Ziglar included a statement that he got his weight down to 165 pounds. This was 10 months before the book went to press. And then he placed an order with the printer for 25,000 copies! Now, remember, at the time he wrote these words, Ziglar actually weighed 202 pounds. He put his credibility on the line with at least 25,000 people! By including a statement that he weighed 165 pounds, Ziglar knew that he had to lose 37 pounds before the book was printed. And, he did it by starting immediately! He knew he couldn't put it off. **Success in any endeavor begins by starting now!** And that includes following Christ. If we put off committing our lives more fully to him, chances are we never will. **That is our nature.**

There is a second reason for URGENCY. IT IS TIED TO OUR COMMITMENT TO HIM. Time is passing by quickly and so much of it is being wasted because we do not have a great purpose for our lives. There is no limit to what we can accomplish once we know what our purpose is and *put our hand to the plow.*

In 1961 a group of students in Nashville, Tennessee set out to make a difference in the world. They were the third of three buses of Freedom Riders who set out to end segregation throughout the South. This was dangerous business. The two previous busloads of Freedom Riders had already encountered fire-bombings and severe beatings, and the Nashville students determined that the movement, having commenced, should not be allowed to fail. No one could deny that these students experienced joy during their trials--the notorious Bull Connor complained, "I just couldn't stand their singing"--but these students were fully mindful of the potential cost as well. The night before their departure, they had signed their last will and testaments.

Friends, those young Freedom Riders changed our world. The greatest reason that we do not use time effectively is that our lives have no driving purpose, no grand aspiration. There is an urgency about making a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ right now because of our nature and because OF THE NEEDS OF OUR SOCIETY. **We need to commit to change... otherwise, we squander our most valuable resource, OUR TIME.**

But there is a third reason for this URGENCY--and that is...THE WORLD IS IN NEED. For example, in this materialistic age and society in which we live many of us have grown callous to the fact that there really are boys and girls and men and women dying of malnutrition and disease brought on by one thing--simple poverty. We, the few, have so much while the vast majority of God's children have so little. **Does anyone care?** Somebody needs to do something and do it now! Every minute that is lost means sorrow and suffering for a little one somewhere. **Do you see the urgency?** Human needs go far beyond poverty. **There are people in our very community whose souls are shriveling up within them because they feel that no one cares for them.** What do you think being part of a loving church family could do for them? Will it be too late by the time we reach out to them?

There are young people on the wrong path. To them, they are simply having a good time. But the tentacles of addiction are slowly enfolding them into its grip. Can we reach them before it's too late and their very lives are strangled out of them?

It ought to be plain now that the really important things in life cannot be put off--*showing our affection* for loved ones BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE--*ridding ourselves of a destructive habit or weakness or sin,* BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE--or *committing our life to Christ,* BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE. **If we put off turning to Christ, it is unlikely that we will ever NOTICE HIS CALL. That is our nature. **We could be so much more effective in how we use our time if we could but center our lives in him.** And there are people's lives that we can touch, that we really can help, if we act before it is too late.**

What is Satan's most effective tool--tell them there is no heaven? No. Tell them there is no hell? No, not that either. TELL THEM THERE IS NO NEED TO HURRY. My friends, there are some things in life about which we should really want to hurry. GIVING YOUR LIFE IN "SERVICE TO CHRIST" is a very urgent need! Do it today! Now! Amen.