

TITLE: NOW IS THE TIME

BIG IDEA:

FOUR PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE URGENCY OF THE NEW YEAR

INTRODUCTION:

First, in the tradition of Dan Snyder, the owner of the Washington Redskins, I have to start by wishing all of you a **Happy Thanksgiving**. When I saw his press conference this week introducing his new head football coach, I thought his opening blunder spoke volumes about the top level management of the team.

Instead of focusing on Thanksgiving Day this morning, I thought it would be a good occasion for a **New Year's** oriented message. So this sermon will be more topical today than my usual exegetical focus on just one paragraph of scripture. We will keep your fingers busy turning to 4 different main texts.

2020 is upon us. Hard to believe. Time marches on. Seems like just yesterday we were all buzzing about what would happen to our computer systems when we enter the new millennium in the year 2000. Of course that turned out to be a non-event.

God has a great sense of time. He is the God of eternity. We are finite created beings. **Gen. 1:1** – “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them.*” We are just coming out of the Christmas season. **Galatians 4:4** says that God sent His Son in the *fullness of time* – at just the right time ... to bring salvation to us and deliverance from our sins. History is **HIS STORY** – God knows the future and is accomplishing His kingdom agenda according to His timing

2020 is not just the beginning of a new year ... but of a new decade. It is especially a significant milestone for me. I just retired at the end of the year after 38 years in business management – 28 years with AlbanCat – the local Caterpillar dealership and another 10 years with Johnson & Towers – another dealership in this Mid-Atlantic region. Time to reflect. Time to seek the Lord's will for how to invest my time and talents.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE URGENCY OF THE NEW YEAR

“NOW IS THE TIME” – How are we going to respond in light of the urgency of Today?

**I. LOOKING AT URGENCY FROM THE CREATOR / CREATURE PERSPECTIVE
(Psalm 90:12) NOW IS THE TIME TO WISELY INVEST OUR DAYS**

“So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.”

Prayer of Moses

Moses brings a unique perspective to this issue of time. Remember how God prepared him for leadership by having him shepherd the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, a Midianite priest, while in exile from the Egyptian royal family for a period of 40 years. Then he spent another 40 years wandering in the wilderness, not allowed to enter the promised land because of disobedience. He had a lot of time to reflect on what it meant to spend his days wisely.

Look with me at the context of Psalm 90.

BECAUSE OUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED:

I. (:1-2) WE NEED GOD’S PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE HE IS THE ETERNAL ONE, THE CREATOR, THE SOVEREIGN OVER HISTORY

II. (:3-6) WE NEED GOD’S PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE OF OUR FINITENESS

III. (:7-12) WE NEED GOD’S PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE OF OUR SINFULNESS

The one resource that the Lord has made constant for everybody is time. Each of us have the same 24 hours each day to use. Now the number of our days varies. Only God knows if 2020 is the year when our days on earth will end. But each day we have the opportunity to make a wise or foolish investment of our time. What will be the return on your investment?

You just can’t tell how many days God has allotted to you. I don’t know how long I will have in this retirement phase of life. Let me tell you a tragic story about my brother-in-law --

Illustration: Mark Phebus struck by a tree – cruising around on the Sky Line Drive – that tree had his name and date and time stamped on it by a sovereign Lord. God doesn’t make mistakes.

In the book of wisdom, Solomon instructs us in **Proverbs 27:1**

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”

We cannot be **presumptuous** in making plans for the future ... but we can’t be **passive** either; we need to be aggressive in living by faith and using our days wisely

Maybe the Lord has a special **divine appointment** for you in the coming weeks – something special He wants you to accomplish for Him as His servant. Remember the **story of Esther** in the OT: God raised her up just at the right moment in history to preserve the Jewish people – Haman had plotted to manipulate the Persian king to wipe out the Jews but Mordecai counseled Esther:

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, [God is going to accomplish His kingdom agenda] but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14

I love that phrase. Who knows what **divine appointments** God has for each of us in 2020?

The Apostle Paul certainly knew what it meant to take advantage of every opportunity: His counsel in **Ephesians 5:15:**

Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

There can be no question the days are evil.

Application: Are you aggressively looking for opportunities to wisely serve the Lord in this New Year?

Are you investing your time from a *heart of wisdom* or from a selfish perspective of seeking comfort and entertainment and worldly possessions?

Wisely Invest Your Days

AS WE MOVE THRU THE REMAINING 3 PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE URGENCY OF THE NEW YEAR

We will track them along the 3 phases of our salvation: **initial salvation**, **ongoing salvation** which we refer to as sanctification and the **final phase of salvation** = glorification

II. LOOKING AT URGENCY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INITIAL SALVATION (2 Cor. 6:2) NOW IS THE TIME TO WANT SALVATION

“Now is the day of salvation” **Is. 49:8** quote

Two aspects here:

- You need to want salvation for yourself
- You need to want to see others saved

Context: Paul defending his apostolic ministry; has been charged with the ministry of reconciliation; we are ambassadors for Christ – pleading with others to be reconciled to God; the time of salvation is not endless;

So first, let’s make sure that we don’t miss out on salvation ourselves:

Look at how **God’s Grace** is at the heart of the offering of the gospel here – unmerited kindness to make this offer of salvation – the gospel message has been brought near; you need to respond in repentance and faith; God is listening; you need to call on His mercy and grace; Urgency throughout this passage

- Appointed time for when God sent Christ to this earth;
- Appointed time for when God is reaching out to sinners offering them salvation; Urgency here
- Appointed time for Christ’s return in judgment

Illustration: My son was having a theological discussion with our 5 year-old grandson. “I think I will want Jesus to rule my life the day He comes back.” That won’t be possible. “Well then, I will submit to Him the day before he comes back.” It doesn’t work that way.

“At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— **Romans 5:6-8**

God is not calling you to get your act together, to clean yourself up, to make yourself worthy so that you can come to him. He wants you to confess your sins; to understand that the penalty for sin is eternal separation from God and to flee for mercy and grace into the arms of Christ who came to die in your place for your sins and was raised from the dead to be your Lord and Savior.

But you might say, I am just not ready to make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ.

What are the problems with delaying repentance? **Now is the day of salvation!**

- You don’t know how long the window of opportunity to respond will remain open
- Continuing in sin hardens our heart and makes it more difficult to come to Jesus – there is a hardening quality to the gospel as well as a softening quality --

- You are missing out on God's blessing on your life
- There is a point of no return

I **urge you** this morning (that is the main word throughout this context in 2 Cor. 5-6) – if you are not sure that you have been born again into God's family; don't delay – respond to God's offer of salvation today with **repentance** and **faith**

Secondly, for the family of God gathered here this morning, let's sense the urgency for proclaiming the gospel to others in 2020:

Urgency of the Great Commission – Matt. 28:18ff “*Go and make disciples of all the nations*”
Our personal lives; our church mission should revolve around the Great Commission

Fulfill your calling as an **Ambassador of Jesus Christ** – making the free offer of the gospel to all to be reconciled to God

Jesus called His disciples to leave their occupation of their fishing nets and to follow Him and He promised to make them **fishers of men** –

I don't know a ton about fishing ... but there is a lot more involved than just casting a line into the water

- You have to go where the fish are – Are we committed to relationships with non-believers in 2020?
- There is purpose and planning involved
- There is patience and perseverance involved

Application: Let's re-commit ourselves to be fishers of men in the New Year; to fulfill our calling as the disciples of Jesus Christ

NOW IS THE TIME TO WANT SALVATION

III. LOOKING AT URGENCY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ONGOING SALVATION = SANCTIFICATION

(Rom. 13:11-14) NOW IS THE TIME TO WAKE UP AND SERVE THE LORD

Exhorting believers to love one another and thus fulfill God's law

“And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. . . Let us put on Jesus Christ”

vs. 8-10 Exhortation to love our neighbor – we know who are neighbor is from the parable of the Good Samaritan

We need to wake up and serve the Lord by living out our Christian brand of Christ-like love

Illustration: Sleep walking of our children; Sleep walking is unnatural; it is a contradiction; I have found that when my children are sleep walking, they certainly don't accomplish anything productive.

Some of us need to **wake up** in our Christian life. We need to put off the old man and put on Jesus Christ. There is a moral aspect of holiness to laying aside the deeds of darkness and

displaying the character of Jesus Christ.

We need to spring into action and love others in practical ways. We need to follow Jesus Christ in genuine discipleship. We can't just glide through another year with no direction; with no commitment; with no sense of urgency; with no sense of Christian mission; look at all that Jesus accomplished in His brief 3+ years of earthly ministry. He knew what it was to be about His Father's business and finish the work that had been laid out for him to accomplish.

Too many of us are guilty of **procrastination** in our Christian life – we know the right things we need to commit to ... but we just can't seem to bring ourselves to follow thru – that is true with the basic commitments to living the Christian life – our commitment to prayer, to reading the Word, to witnessing, to developing relationships

Illustration: Can't hit the Snooze button – must have sense of urgency; this is the time to awaken from sleep

One thing we can say with certainty about entering the year 2020 – *“for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.”* That is encouraging ... but that should also be challenging.

NOW IS THE TIME TO WAKE UP AND SERVE THE LORD

The final perspective:

IV. LOOKING AT URGENCY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FINAL SALVATION = GLORIFICATION

(Mark 13:32-33) NOW IS THE TIME TO WATCH FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”

We have so many **Alerts** in our culture today, that I am afraid we have become numb to their value. Almost like the phenomena of the boy who cried “Wolf.” Alerts are intended to wake us up and cause us to have a heightened sense of awareness so that we are on guard and won't get caught by surprise. We have alerts for:

- **Weather alerts** – even come across your cell phone now as well as your TV
 - floods, hurricanes, tornados
 - smog levels, atmospheric conditions
 - susceptibility to fire, etc.
- **Amber alerts** – when some young child has gone missing or been taken
- **Terrorist alerts** – we have a color coded system to tell us how serious the threat level is at any point in time
- **Breaking news alerts** – to provide information on key stories that can't wait for the usual programming times; even sports alerts
 - this coach just got fired
 - this star athlete is in trouble for domestic violence
- **Health alerts** – the status of some flu epidemic or the recall of some brand of lettuce or some other threat to our health and well-being
- **Financial alerts** – condition of the stock market and how it is impacting your portfolio and your retirement funds; critical action that you must take on a timely basis

No end to alerts – I used to mock this ...

But when Jesus calls us to **Be On ALERT** – we had better listen and respond. We can't afford to overlook His warnings or take His exhortations lightly. This must be serious stuff. We know that is true as well because Jesus just has several days left on earth and He concludes His teaching ministry with His disciples with these important words. What is going on in this context in Mark 13?

The occasion is Jesus leaving the temple complex where He had just been interacting with the Jewish religious leaders and exposing their hypocrisy and failure to grasp both the teaching of the Scripture and the power of God. This interaction **sparked a question** from one of His disciples. Vs. 4 – *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?”* The response of Jesus was the gateway to delivering what has been called the **Mt. Olivet Discourse** because of its setting.

It should be no surprise to find that this prophetic passage from the lips of Jesus must be taken on multiple levels. While there seems to be some near term reference to events about to happen in 70 AD (the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple), the ultimate fulfillment surely awaits the end time events which include what is called the **Great Tribulation** and the **Second Coming of Christ**. The trigger event is the **Abomination of Desolation** which we don't have time to study in detail this morning.

The main focus here for Jesus was that:

ISRAEL (WHO WAS ASLEEP AT THE SWITCH FOR CHRIST'S FIRST COMING) HAD BETTER BE ON THE ALERT FOR CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Jesus gives a ton of very practical reasons for us to be on the alert regarding His return:

- His return will involve **Destruction** -- **judgment** – vs. 2 - *“And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another which will not be torn down.’”*
- His return will be clouded by **Deception and confusion** as many believers will be misled – vs. 5 – *“See to it that no one misleads you”*
 - o We might be vulnerable to strong, charismatic cult type leaders – who falsely claim to be the Messiah
 - o We might be confused by dramatic events in history like wars and rumors of wars
 - o We might be confused by cosmic natural calamities like earthquakes and famines
- Need for **perseverance** in light of the **Danger** associated with the events of His return; don't be anxious when faced with persecution or pressure because of your identification with Christ

Need to be aware of the times and the seasons

Need to be aware of what is happening around us in our country and in our culture

“Ready or not, here I come” – **James 5:8-9** *“the coming of the Lord is near ... the Judge is standing right at the door”*

Illustration: coaching little league baseball – before the ball is pitched, the fielders need to get down in the **ready position** so that they are prepared if the ball is hit to them;

What does that ready position look like for believers?

- Awake . . . not asleep; can't be nodding off – look at what will happen shortly in Jesus' prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane
14:37 *“Could you not keep watch for one hour?”*
- Focused . . . not distracted
- Discerning the signs of the times . . . not oblivious
- Girded for action . . . not paralyzed; you need to have your shoes tied
- Anticipate . . . not get caught by surprise – what are you going to do if the ball is hit to you?
- Accountable . . . not irresponsible

How can I increase my level of alertness as I anticipate the return of Jesus Christ?

CONCLUSION: LIVE FOR ETERNITY

Illustration: The clock is ticking. I remember Karen's folks giving us a very generous present of a **cuckoo clock** when we were living in a small trailer in a mobile home court in frigid Indiana while at seminary. I just couldn't keep that clock – as much as Karen liked it. The constant noise of the tick, tick, tick drove me cuckoo.

But the clock is ticking in 2020 for all of us. Tick, Tick, Tick

How will we respond to the urgency of today?

NOW IS THE TIME TO WISELY INVEST OUR DAYS

NOW IS THE TIME TO WANT SALVATION

(for both ourselves and for others)

NOW IS THE TIME TO WAKE UP AND SERVE THE LORD

(display that Christian brand of Christ-like love)

NOW IS THE TIME TO WATCH FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

2020 – NOW IS THE TIME!