

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 25 September 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Time Is Running Out for the Saved!

In the year 1906, an 18-year old woman named Bertha Halstenberg set off from a prairie town in western Missouri to the city of St. Louis, in search of a job. Being of German stock, she had attended a German-speaking church all her life; but since the death of her mother seven years earlier, church had become especially important to Bertha. Desperately missing her mother, and desiring to go to Heaven to be with her, she went to church to ease her hurt, and to try to earn favour with God. However, it wasn't until she moved to St. Louis that she attended a church where the true Gospel was preached. As she sat under the preaching, she was convicted of her sin, and realised that she did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. She also understood, for the first time in her life, that she *couldn't* earn her way to Heaven. At the invitation at the end of the service, she went to the front of the church, and an elderly man dealt with her. Seeing that Bertha was in deep distress about her soul, he opened his Bible and showed her the words of **John 3:36**: ***“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*** That day, she stopped trusting in her own righteousness, and asked Christ to be her Saviour; and her life was never the same again.

In time, the Lord put into her heart the desire to serve Him on a mission field. She thought that Africa was where God wanted her to go; and in 1918, at age 30, she eagerly travelled to New York City to catch a boat to Africa. However, a “concerned citizen” in the customs office denied her passport on account of her German name, “Halstenberg.” (After all, the war was on, and Germans were the “enemy.”)

Bertha was devastated by this; but the director of the Bible college where she had received training for the mission field counselled her to go to a home mission in Dover, Tennessee; and God used her mightily there. Later, she married a Christian man named Dr. Holderman, who was the director of a sanitarium in Mississippi. In this community, Bertha poured herself into the lives of everyone around her. She nursed sick people to health, and taught young women homemaking skills; and she constantly told people how they could be saved. Not only did she lead her own children to the Lord, but she gathered children from all over the area, and did Bible clubs with them, and led many of them to Christ.

After their kids were grown, Dr. Holderman and Bertha moved to Tampa, Florida. However, not long after this, Dr. Holderman died. After his death, Bertha became involved in mission works in Tampa. However, the opportunity soon opened for her to go with a family named the Turnballs to Haiti, to start a mission work there! At this point, Bertha was 59 years old; but she believed that God wanted her to go to these people of African lineage, whom she loved. Bertha had no fears about going to a country with a 75% infant mortality rate, a 98% illiteracy rate, fierce hurricanes, mud roads and huts, deadly parasites, running sewage, and with witchcraft and voodoo everywhere. In fact, the Turnball's son, Wallace, purchased a piece of land right on top of a voodoo burial ground, and began the Baptist Haiti Mission.

For the last 32 years of her life, Bertha poured herself into the Haitian people. Not once did she so much as purchase a new dress or shoes for herself. She was always serving others. Many were delivered from the darkness of witchcraft, and found the joy that only Christ can give. She and Wallace also did what the U.N. *couldn't* do very effectively: they taught people skills, and lifted them out of poverty, at minimal cost. Through the Baptist Haiti Mission, 162 schools were founded, with 20,000 students! Everyone loved Bertha; and they simply called her “Granny.”

Granny passed away in 1975, while she was travelling in the U.S. to encourage young people in Baptist churches to serve the Lord. In the frigid January weather, she developed pneumonia; and on Thursday,

15 February 1975, at 6:00 p.m., she went to be with the Lord.¹ Brethren, we need a lot more Granny Holdermans! God granted Granny a long life; and she didn't waste one moment of it. As God's people, we must remember that we have only a short time to serve the King. Time is running out for the lost; but time is also running out for *us*. The title of this message is ***Time Is Running Out for the Saved***.

Read Psalm 90:1-17.

I. Christians have a limited time on this earth.

You'll notice that **Psalm 90** begins with the title, "***A Prayer of Moses the man of God.***" Most of the psalms were written by King David; but this psalm was written by Moses, during the years of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. It was probably sung by the people in their tents, as well as by the priests as they labored in the Tabernacle.

Now, think about the situation of the children of Israel when Moses wrote this psalm. It is believed that Moses wrote this psalm shortly after God sentenced Israel to wander in the wilderness for 38 more years on account of their rebellion against Him at Kadesh Barnea. Because the people had refused to trust God when He *commanded* them to go in and possess the land of Canaan, God was now refusing to *let* them enter it. They knew very well that no one over the age of 20 (except for Joshua and Caleb) was allowed to enter Canaan; instead, they would all die in the wilderness over the next four decades. They knew that for the rest of their lives they would be looking at the dry, desolate, barren landscape of the Arabian desert. That is why Moses said, "***Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.***" For 38 years, they were constantly reminded of the folly of their sin, which had kept them from the blessing of inheriting Canaan. That is why Moses wrote, "***Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.***" In other words, now that they were barred from entering into Canaan, the story of their lives seemed to be as pointless as an old wives' tale that is told around the evening campfire.

Yet, the "tale" of their life in the desert *wasn't* pointless. As a nation, they were *still* God's "***dwelling place***"—just as their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been. God *still* dwelt in their midst; and He was still with them. Even in their long exile from Promised Land, God had important work for them to do. God wanted the people to teach His Word, and His promise of redemption, to their children, so that when the time came for their children to go into the land of Canaan, they would be spiritually equipped to do so, because they had a vibrant, personal relationship with their God.

However, in order for them to rise to this task, they needed some schooling in the solitude of the desert. They needed to spend much time thinking about the eternity of God, and about the brevity of their own lives. As they looked out on the gnarled, barren hills, which had been carved out by the Flood a thousand years earlier, and which had been created by God 2,600 years earlier, they were reminded that a thousand years is nothing to God. To Him, a thousand years is like a "***watch in the night.***" They needed to be reminded that their lives were short. Though 38 years seemed like a long time, it would soon be gone, just like grass that grows up, then withers away; and only what they did for God would matter. That is why Moses wrote, "***So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.***"

Brethren, if we are going to "apply *our* hearts to wisdom," we *must* be in the regular habit of "numbering our days." Thinking often about the shortness and uncertainty of our lives

¹ Clifford E. Clark, *Drama in the Real Lives of Missionaries* (Tulsa, OK: John the Baptist Printing Ministries), pp. 75-96.

reminds us that we have only a short time to live for God. That is why Solomon wrote, ***“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart.”*** That is why James wrote, ***“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”*** Christians who do the “divine arithmetic” of numbering their days won’t be wasting their time chasing worthless trinkets of this world. God had work for the children of Israel to do in the Old Testament dispensation; and He has work for *us* to do in this New Testament dispensation. Our job is not to offer up lambs on the altar, as the Levite priests did; our job, as kings and priests to God, is to offer up sacrifices of praise and service to God, and to point men to the *true* Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has commissioned us to ***“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”*** Our lives are *not* pointless, idle tales: our lives are infinitely precious to God. They are small windows of history in which we can serve God, point people to the Saviour, and snatch souls from the burning. This brings us to our second point.

II. **Christians have a limited time of service on this earth.**

In **Isaiah 38**, we are told about the time when King Hezekiah was deathly sick, and God sent Isaiah to inform him that he was going to die, and that he needed to get his house in order. Hezekiah prayed, and cried to the Lord to give him more time on this earth: and here is how he framed his request. He said, ***“For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”***

Hezekiah knew very well that death would **not** mark the end of his existence. He knew that his spirit would go to Paradise after he died. However, what concerned Hezekiah was that if he were dead, he could no longer praise the Lord in *the land of the living*. (King David often expressed this same concern in his psalms, when enemies were trying to take his life from him.) How could Hezekiah influence his children to love, serve, praise, and hope and trust in the LORD, if he weren’t around to *show* them how to praise and trust the LORD? *That* was Hezekiah’s concern. Of course, we know the story: God heard Hezekiah’s request, and granted him 15 more years of life. However, Hezekiah didn’t use those 15 years very wisely. He became filled with pride on account of all the riches that God had given him; and although he eventually got right with the LORD again, he lost his son Manasseh’s heart. Manasseh was born during those last 15 years; and when he came to the throne after his father’s death, he became the most wicked king that ever sat on the throne of Judah. Hezekiah wanted more time in this life in order to teach his children God’s truth; but he didn’t use the time well.

Brethren, we have a great commission here on this earth. That commission is to teach and preach the Gospel to the lost; to baptise people into the membership of local churches; to teach church members all things that Christ has commanded; and to repeat this process by sending forth labourers to establish *more* local churches. It is a huge task; and our time is limited. Not only do we not know when the lost people around us will have *their* appointments with death, but *we* do not know when *our own* appointments are. Unlike Hezekiah, and a few others to whom God revealed their time of death, we do not know when our appointed time is.

Of course, there is always the hope that we will live to see the Rapture. Not *all* Christians will have to pass through the veil of physical death. As Paul said, ***“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”*** However,

apart from the hope of living until the Rapture, we all must face our appointed day of death. We all have an “eleventh hour” of service to God.

Read Matthew 20:1-16.

In Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard, there was, first of all, a **“husbandman”** (a fruit farmer). This fruit farmer represents the Lord Jesus Christ. The **“labourers”** who were hired by the husbandman represent those who have received God's gift of salvation. The “first,” “third,” “sixth,” “ninth,” and “eleventh” hours would, in our reckoning, be 6:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m. These times represent the different stages of life when people are saved, and enter into Christ's service. It can also represent the “hours” of this present church age, which will one day come to an end, on the day of the Rapture. (We will talk about this next week!)

Now, this leaves one more question: “What is the **“penny”**?” Well, our word **“penny”** is translated from the word *denarius*. A Roman *denarius* was one day's pay for the average man. And what does this **“penny”** represent? It can represent a couple different things.

First, the **“penny”** can represent salvation itself. When it comes to the matter of salvation, this parable has one simple teaching. The teaching is that every person who places his faith in Christ receives the same “reward” that every other true believer receives, regardless of how early or late in life he was saved. The “reward” that every believer receives is eternal life with God. Even those who come into the Kingdom of God at the “eleventh hour” (the last days, or even hours, of life) will receive an **“inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”** for them. This is not unfair to those who were saved much earlier in life, because the labourers in God's Kingdom are not saved by their own merits in the first place! Salvation is not a debt that God owes us: it is a free gift of His grace. We don't deserve it; but God, in His mercy, is willing to give it to anyone who will have it!

Jesus' teaching about the **“eleventh hour”** goes contrary to every false gospel that was ever concocted. People who believe that they can work to earn their salvation scorn the idea that a truly repentant sinner can receive salvation in the last hour of his life, simply by repenting and believing on Jesus' name. For example, **Brigham Young**, the second president of the Mormon church, once made this statement: “Some of our old traditions teach us that a man guilty of atrocious and murderous acts may savingly repent on the scaffold; and upon his execution hear the expression—'Bless God! he has gone to heaven, to be crowned in glory, through the all-redeeming merits of Christ the Lord!' *This is all nonsense*. Such a character will never see heaven” (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 8, p. 61). My friends, what Brigham Young called “nonsense” is what the Bible calls the precious Gospel of God's grace! The thief on the cross believed on Jesus not only at the **“eleventh hour,”** but in the last few “seconds” of the eleventh hour! Yet, Jesus assured him, **“Verily I say unto you, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”** The thief did nothing to earn his salvation. He didn't even have time to be baptised, or to do anything for the Lord—other than surrender his heart to Him. Yet, he received the same “reward” of salvation that those who are saved early in life receive!

Now, this parable also teaches us something about the *rewards* that Christians will receive for their service to God. (It would make sense that Jesus was mainly addressing the matter of rewards, since Peter had just asked Jesus what reward they would receive for leaving all and following Him.) You see, “salvation” and “service to God *after* salvation” are two distinct things; yet, at the same time, they cannot be separated. Why? Because the whole reason that Jesus saves sinners is that they might now serve God with their lives! A Christian's **“yoke”** is

easy, and his **“burden”** is **“light,”** because his labour for God is a labour of *love*, and not a “debt” to *earn* salvation. Yet, there *is* a **“yoke”** and a **“burden”** of service, nonetheless.

So, then, if we apply this parable to the matter of rewards, what does this parable teach us? Does it teach us that there will be *no differences in reward* for our service—that all Christians will receive exactly the same rewards in the Kingdom, regardless of how fervently or slothfully they served the Lord in this lifetime? Clearly, this was not Jesus’ meaning, because in His parable of the talents in **Luke 19**, He said that some of His servants will rule over ten cities, and some over five cities, and so on. In **1 Corinthians 3**, Paul said that Christians will **“suffer loss”** of reward for what they did in the flesh. Even in Jesus’ initial answer to Peter’s question about rewards, Jesus assured the disciples that in the Kingdom, the Apostles will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Obviously, not everyone will receive that particular honour. There *will* be differences in reward, according to how faithfully Christians served the Lord, and according to the particular jobs that God gave them.

What, then, does Jesus mean when he says that those who came in the eleventh hour received the same reward as those who came in the first hour received? The point is that *God is gracious and sovereign in the handing out of rewards*. In His grace, God may choose to give the same level of reward to someone who was saved later in life, and who served Him faithfully for only a few short years, as He will give to someone who was saved early in life, and who served Him faithfully for many decades.

The bottom line is this: it is not the *number of years of service* that God will honour: rather, it is *faithfulness to the Lord* during the years of one’s Christian life. It is all of His grace, from beginning to end. God is the one who initiated our salvation in the first place, and sought us out for service (just as the fruit farmer in Jesus’ parable went out into the market *seeking* labourers for His vineyard). *We* were not seeking *Christ*; instead, *He* was the one who sought after *us*. *He* came to *us*, and offered us both **salvation, and the privilege of serving Him**. When we entered Christ’s “employ” (at the moment of salvation), we did not get to choose *what* service we would do, or what *rewards* we would receive for our service: rather, He, as the “Employer,” already knew where He would send us, and what rewards He would give us.

If you do not personally know Christ as your Saviour, I would urge you to respond to His call to salvation! You don’t know when you might be in your “eleventh hour.” In His love and grace, Christ wants to save you, and use you in His service, and reward you in His future Kingdom! Jesus says, **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

If you *do* know Christ as your Saviour, never lose your wonder that Christ would save a sinner like you, and use you in His service! It matters not whether you are saved when you were 7, 17, or 70 years old. God has work for you to do; and His reward is with Him.

When Jesus ate breakfast with His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after His resurrection, He revealed to Peter something concerning his future. First, He revealed that Peter *would* die. Secondly, He revealed that He would die in an undesirable way—by execution. What was Peter’s reaction to this? Let’s take a look.

Read John 21:15-23.

When Peter found out that he was going to die a martyr's death, the first thing he wanted to know was, "What about *John* over there? What will happen to *him*?" Jesus' response to this question speaks to all of us. He said, "***If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.***" That is the bottom line, brethren! Regardless of whether we are appointed to die, or to live until the Rapture, you and I must follow Christ's command to seek lost sheep, to bring them into His fold, and to feed them God's Word. Some, like the Apostle James, may reach their "eleventh hour" very early. (James was the first of the Apostles to die, about ten years after Christ's return to Heaven, in A.D. 41. He was put to death by beheading.) Others may reach their "eleventh hour" much later (such as James's brother, John, who died more than six decades after Christ's ascension back to Heaven, around A.D. 98). The time of our appointment is up to God to decide; but until then, God desires *quality service* from us.

By the way, Peter learned his lesson well. God changed Peter into a very different man. He was no longer afraid of death, nor concerned about the "when" of his death: he was concerned only about serving God faithfully until God chose to take Him home.

Read Acts 12:1-19.

Peter was so at peace about the seemingly certain execution that he was facing the next morning, that he was *sleeping soundly* in the midst of the 16 guards to whom he was chained! The angel actually had to smite Peter on the side to wake him up! Peter wasn't fretting about death, because he had been serving Christ faithfully, and he was not ashamed to stand before his Lord. Christian, do you have this same calm assurance in your heart? Are you doing the work that Christ has commissioned you to do?

Brethren, life's day is short. We must be filling our hearts with God's Word, and being faithful to God's house, and giving to support missions, and going where God sends us, and witnessing to the lost, and fasting, and watching unto prayer. We must pray for boldness to proclaim the Gospel—both for ourselves, and for others. We must pray that the enemy would be bound, and that doors of witness would be opened to us. We must pray that God will send forth labourers into His harvest, and that He will protect His servants as they go (just as He protected Peter). The night is coming, when our work on earth will be done.

Read John 9:1-5.

III. Christians must use every opportunity to obey the Great Commission.

Read Acts 1:6-8.

J. Hudson Taylor, the man who brought the Gospel to inland China in the 1800's, once made this statement: "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered: it is a command to be obeyed." When you are walking closely with the Lord, and are filled with the Spirit of God, you will take the Great Commission seriously! You *will* redeem the time. You will view every moment as another opportunity to be a witness for Christ. Let's take a look at a few people who took the Great Commission seriously, right up to the very end.

Read Acts 6:8 – 7:3 and 7:47 – 8:3.

Stephen *could* have modified his speech a little bit as he was giving his defence before the people—if he were concerned for his own life. He could have "soft petaled" it, and not have emphasised Jesus so much. He certainly could have left out that condemning statement, "***Ye***

stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.” Yet, he didn’t. He said exactly what he knew that God wanted him to say. Furthermore, he took the very last seconds of his life to testify of Jesus. He said, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* God used those words to cut into the heart of a proud Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, who was assisting in the stoning of Stephen. A year or so later, when Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, Jesus appeared to him and said, *“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”* You see, ever since Stephen’s trial, Saul had not been able to get Stephen’s words and testimony out of his mind. God had used Stephen’s words to prick at Saul’s heart, and to convict him that Jesus is the Messiah. Years later, when Paul was speaking to the crowds in Jerusalem, he recounted how when the blood of Stephen was shed, *he* was standing by, and consenting to his death. Paul never could get over that! Stephen had an appointed time; and he used every last minute to testify for Jesus.

Time would fail us to tell of the millions of faithful men and women who obeyed the Great Commission right up to the very end of the “eleventh hour.” Take, for example, the Scottish Baptist preacher **John Harper**, who died in the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912. The Christians in his congregation had sensed, through the Holy Spirit, that the *Titanic*’s voyage would end in disaster; and they had pleaded with him to take the *Lusitania* to America instead of the *Titanic*. However, Harper knew that for some reason, God wanted him on the *Titanic*. While the *Titanic* was going down, and he was clinging to a piece of driftwood, he swam around from person to person in the icy water, and cried out, *“Are you saved?”* One young man whom he asked this question replied “No”; and Harper cried out to him, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!”* Twice he came within earshot of his man, and twice he asked the same question; and just after asking it for the second time, he lost his grip of the driftwood, and sank to his icy grave. That young man was rescued by the *Carpathia* that morning; and weeks later, he testified at a church in Ontario, Canada, that he *did* now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! He was Harper’s last convert.

We could tell of **Bob Hughes**, whom God used to establish **Bible Baptist Church** in Cebu City, as well as many other churches throughout the Philippines. He started a Christian radio outreach, and was instrumental in getting the Bible translated into many dialects. Yet, at age 43, this robust, healthy, one-time quarterback was diagnosed with terminal cancer. At first, he was devastated. How would the work carry on? It was only the beginning! But then, a Christian nurse from his own church whispered in his ear, *“In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* That got him! Did he really believe what he had taught the people all those years? Did he not believe that God could use the people whom he had led to Christ to carry on the work? His attitude suddenly changed. Hughes himself said, “That moment I looked up, and the power of God’s Word lifted me right out of the bowels of despair, as I released my human reaction, *thanked* God for the cancer, and rested in the arms of the Lord. Indeed, the worst possible cancer of all is self-pity, as it rends and tears and spreads its malignant tentacles, blinding one to Truth.”² On 21 August 1976, Bob Hughes had his appointment with God. To the last, he obeyed the Great Commission.

Read Ephesians 5:8-17.

Conclusion: Brethren, the time is short. We must walk circumspectly, and redeem the time that God gives us. We do not know how long the lost people around us have before they will go to their appointment. We do not know long *we* have until *our* appointments, either. And (as we shall see next week) we do not know how long we have until Jesus comes. Christian, are you using your time wisely?

² *Ibid*, pp. 97-106.

Time is running out to fulfil the Great Commission! I would also ask, “**Are you ready to meet the Lord? Are you saved?**” If you have not been saved, you *must* be, if you would see the Kingdom of God! Jesus died for you, and shed His precious blood to wash away your sin. By His blood, our sins are atoned. However, you must personally apply His blood to the doorpost of your heart, by simply confessing your sin, repenting of your sin in your heart, and believing that Jesus is all you need to save you. Ask Him to save you, and to come into your heart, and to be your Lord and Saviour, and He will!