

January 22, 2006

"The Time Is Short"

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

Last Sunday a 29 year old woman died while surfing near UCSB in Santa Barbara. The leash on her board caught in the rocks. The powerful waves pulled her under water. She cried out in desperation, "I am dying." Other surfers came to the rescue including one who was a former lifeguard. By the time they got to her and freed her from the powerful currents, her body was already lifeless. They took her ashore and attempted CPR. One of those who tried to save her said emotionally over the radio, "It was so hard to hold her body still warm and know that she had died. If only we could have rolled back time and given it one more try we may have saved her."

If only we could roll back time. Think of how often you have wished you had the opportunity to relive a certain segment of your life. But that opportunity is not given to you. Just as water flows down the stream from the mountain and never returns to its source, so we cannot relive the moments of our lives that pass us by. People will come across the path of your life and mine who need to be rescued from perishing eternally. We need to seize the moment. Carpe diem! Seize the day! The same opportunity will not be given to us again.

Jesus made the most of his life here on this earth, especially those three years when he went from village to village preaching the good news of God's kingdom. He told the people, "The time has come." He preached the good news to them as if there would be no tomorrow. Let's turn to these words of Paul from 1 Corinthians where he says, "The time is short." We want to see how this applies to receiving salvation now when we have the opportunity and also to sharing salvation with those who are still lost.

1) The time is short for receiving salvation

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short." Think first about how this applies to the limited amount of time we have to believe in Christ and receive his salvation. In the next letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." The Greek language has two words for time. One word, "chronos" from which we get the word chronology, is movement of time on a clock or sundial. The other word for time is "kairos". It refers to a season or opportunity. When we ask, "What time is it?" we are referring to the time on a clock. When we say, "It is not the right time," we are referring to the right opportunity or season. The phrase, "The time is short" means the opportunity to get something done or to believe in Christ is limited. Ecclesiastes says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every purpose under heaven."

Let me illustrate the importance of time from my experience growing up on a dairy farm.

We produced our own hay to feed the cattle. The hay was cut and allowed to dry on the field before it was put into bales. It was a challenge to make hay while the sun was shining. In the Midwest it rains almost every week in the summer. If the hay was dry, it was not the time to take off and go fishing, or work at other tasks on the farm. Every bit of energy from the whole family was devoted to bringing in the hay before the weather changed. "There is a time for everything, and a season for every purpose under heaven." Then Ecclesiastes goes on to say, "A time to be born and a time die." There are times to rescue people from eternal death and punishment by sharing salvation with them. There are times when we may not be able to do that because the person has died and there is no other chance. "It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgment."

Everything in the Bible tells us that life is short. Psalm 39 says, "Each man's life is like a breath." How quickly the breath on a cold morning dissipates into the air! James 4 says, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." The mist or fog lifts quickly when the sun rises. The 29 year old mother of a little girl dies surfing. So vibrant and full of life, she succumbs to the waves of the ocean. We cannot turn the clock of time back and change the circumstances. The Bible always speaks with urgency when it comes to salvation. Today not tomorrow. Jesus pleaded with people, "Come to me and I will give you rest." He expended himself with long hours during the day, and hours of prayer into the night. It was Jesus who said, "The night comes when no one can work."

The life of Jesus here on this earth was not a long life, only 33 years, but it was a valuable life. It was the source of your salvation. Isolate any moment of Jesus life. Zoom in on it, focus on it, put it under a microscope and examine it thoroughly. You will discover every segment was lived pure and holy in the sight of the heavenly Father even though he was tempted in all parts as we are. That is why the Father said at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Galatians 4 tells, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Jesus lived every second of time under the law, that he might provide a perfect keeping of the law, so we could receive the full rights of sons. Six hours of time is not a lot of time, about two football games. These six hours that Jesus spent on the cross are the most valuable moments anyone has lived on this earth. During that time full payment was made for the sin of the world. According to Isaiah 53 it was during that time that Jesus was stricken, smitten and afflicted by his heavenly Father for our sin. It was during that time he cried out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" so that we can be forgiven and have peace with God.

Why is the life of Jesus' lived in real time here on this earth so valuable to us? We can examine any segment of our lives and find it was corrupted by the decay of sin, even the best moments we have ever lived. Randomly pick any day, any year any time, January 22, 2003 at 12:31 PM for example. Look back into that moment of time, isolate it and examine it and you will come to same conclusion about that moment as you will every other moment you have ever lived. "There is none who does good, no not one." Someday we will stand before God in the final judgment and we will be judged on how we have used our time here on this earth. If sin is found in any single moment or second of time, we have no hope. We must be condemned. That is why the life of Jesus is so valuable. His perfect life became your perfect life. His righteousness is your righteousness. His perfect death scanned over every sin of your life and mine and washed it perfectly clean. God's

search engine makes the search engines that people use to search the Internet look like paging through a phone book. He searches your life and mine and all he sees is the life Jesus lived for us, and the blood that washes us clean from every stain. Your greatest moment in life is the hour that you believed and received this saving faith in Christ.

What does the Lord want for all people? Listen to what Paul told the Greeks in Athens, "God gives all men life and breath and everything else... God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps find him." The Lord God gives people time to believe and he calls us help them receive what we have.

2) The time is so short for sharing this salvation

Time is so short, so very short, for bringing people to the blessings that we have been given in Christ. Because of the lack of time, it may affect how we live our lives even in our families and marriages. Our text tells us, "From now on those who have wives should live as they had none." That is radical. Paul is not against marriage as some claim. Read the other letters and see how he glorifies marriage, even though he was not married personally. Under certain circumstances, the Christians may have to live as if the wonderful companionship in marriage were not the most important use of time.

Let me take you back to the example of the woman who lost her life while surfing. Imagine a man and his wife having a picnic along the beach for their wedding anniversary, toasting each other and ready to eat a very sumptuous meal. Then the call came out from the waves, "I am dying." If the man was an expert swimmer and life guard, he would immediately respond to the urgent cry for help, leaving his wife if necessary and even forgetting about the picnic on the beach to rescue this person.

So it is with other needs in my life. Because the time is short, certain needs take a back seat to reaching out to people and praying for opportunities to rescue them. It may mean that when I mourn for someone who has died that I love, I cannot let this mourning and my emotions and feelings so overwhelm me that I say, "I cannot tell someone about Jesus at this time in my life because I am too sad." And if I am enjoying one of the happiest moments of my life, I may need to say to myself, I cannot let my joy at this time keep me from the opportunity to rescue someone I see who is perishing forever without Christ. And when it comes to buying and selling, and researching on the Internet to buy more stuff, or going to Costco, or furnishing a home, or going on a vacation or managing the stuff I have, I cannot let these things keep me from my mission in life. As Paul reminds us, "For this world in its present form is passing away." If only we could travel lighter as we live for Christ in this 21st century. That reminds us this morning of what our dear brother in Christ Norm Larson often tells us, "In the light of eternity, does it really matter." Everything on this earth, marriage, sadness, happiness, buying and selling, enjoying stuff, is put into perspective in the light of eternity.

In 2 Kings we read the account of the city of Samaria placed under a lengthy siege by the Syrians. People were dying without food. During the night the Lord caused the large army of Syrians to hear the sound of chariots coming across the desert. They ran for their lives thinking that the Egyptians were coming. They left everything behind. Four lepers were outside the city gate, dying of hunger and thirst. That same night they decided to make

a break for it through the Syrian army. They discovered their tents were empty. It says, "They ate and drank and carried away silver and gold and clothes." But then they said to themselves, "This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves... Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace." This is a day of good news. Someone once said, "I am just a beggar sharing with other beggars the bread of life." The time for doing this is short. The disciples left their nets and followed Jesus. He made them fishers of men. That's why Jesus left us here, to rescue the people who someday face their hour of death without him. The time for doing this always short. Amen.