

Lesson 10

As You Have Opportunity

Introduction

In the previous lesson we reminded ourselves that God doesn't do things our way. He is operating from a perspective that is beyond comprehension and moves on a time-table with eternity in view. Scripture teaches us to trust God in everything. We have the assurance that He is with us. His plans never fail.

When we trust in His providence, knowing that every need will be met, we are freed to become a vessel for service. This is the essence of Christianity . . . service and providing encouragement to others.

For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself.

– Galatians 5.13-14

Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

– Romans 15.2

It seems in our day and age that Christians are especially challenged from doing more because of overwhelmed schedules, career demands, and family responsibilities. Individuals and families, both young and old, are seriously pressed. There are hardly any margins left for unexpected things that pop up. Many continually run behind and never feel as if they are caught up. If this describes you, know that your situation is not unique.

However, this is not what God intends. He never wants to see His children so overloaded that their spiritual responsibilities are squeezed out. This is why it is very important for us to regularly evaluate our priorities and make sure that we are being intentional in allowing our spiritual responsibilities to direct the rest of the activities of our lives. Are we making ourselves available to be used by God for service to others and to His kingdom?

Paul's Example

As Acts 16 opens, Paul and Silas began the 2nd missionary journey. After traveling through Derbe and Lystra where the duo picked up Timothy, they traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, Mysia, and finally to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision. A Macedonian man plead with him to go there to help them. Luke writes, *after he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them*, Acts 16.10.

What God wanted Paul to do, he did. Where God wanted Paul to go, he went. He had completely given himself over to the Lord's disposal. He viewed himself as an instrument that had been placed in service to God. So must we.

We must offer ourselves to be used as the tools of God's providence

Have you made yourself available for God's use? You have been called:

To be light. God wants to use you to shine His glory all around. Jesus said: *“You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven,”* Matthew 5.14-16.

To be a burden bearer. There is always someone around who is carrying a heavy load. Life’s difficulties abound. They range in size and scope, but they are always there. God calls on us to help where we can: *Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,* Galatians 6.2.

To be an encourager. This is one of the primary characteristics of our interactions together in the spiritual family. We are to look to be of help to each other in spiritual growth and perseverance. 1 Thessalonians 5.11-15 is a great passage that instructs us to *encourage one another and build each other up...* This also involves giving recognition to those who lead over us, v. 12, and regarding them *very highly in love because of their work,* v. 13.

To be a message bearer. We are always to be looking for ways to share the good news of hope. Paul urged Timothy to take the apostolic message and commit it to *faithful men who will be able to teach others also,* 2 Timothy 2.2. We are people with a hope that are called to be instruments in God’s hand.

Considering the Ethiopian Eunuch and the Story of Cornelius

Acts 8 is a chapter of conversions, despite tremendous persecution by the Jewish authorities. Their actions against the church had the opposite effect of what they intended; the church experienced significant growth. In the first half of the chapter, we read of the gospel going into Samaria ... with many of them becoming Christians. In 8.26, Philip was told by an angel to go into the desert southwest of Jerusalem, toward Gaza. As he did, he came upon the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading out of the book of Isaiah. Philip preached Jesus and the eunuch was baptized.

In Acts 10 we are introduced to Cornelius. The record describes him as a devout Gentile proselyte. He *feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God,* Acts 10.2. As we continued to read the text, we can easily identify this man as a seeker. If there are seekers, and God doesn’t speak directly to humans today, how does God get out His message to the lost?

Was it an accident that these two men encountered preachers of the gospel? Or was God working through men who had placed themselves at God’s disposal in order to be available whenever and wherever the need arose? Whether Peter or Philip realized it at the time, they were instruments of God’s providence. God was working to get them to those who were seeking. *Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you,* Matthew 7.7. God answered their prayers by the commitment and unquestioning service of these two servants.

So it is for us. In ways we may not even realize at the time, God can place us in situations where we can help, encourage, and share the message of hope. Think of people you will meet in the future who may be searching for Christ. God may have placed you in that time and place for that specific purpose. It may be

someone you meet at work, playing sports, or at a local bowling league. When those opportunities arise, are we prepared? Peter wrote:

but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

– 1 Peter 3.15

God's providence doesn't call us for the judgment of people ... it calls us to lead them to deliverance.

A Lesson of Application from Matthew 25

As Jesus wrapped up His final days in Jerusalem He warned about the coming judgment. He spoke of a man who traveled away on a journey. Before leaving the man entrusted his servants to use the talents he gave them and put them to work. One was given five, another two, and finally, one man was given one. The first two men went to work. The man who had five gained five more. The man who had two gained two more. Sadly, the man who only had one talent *went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money*, 25.18. When the master returned, he called the three men in to give an account. The first two were commended, while the last was condemned. When confronted he told the master that he was afraid and by returning the one talent, at least he was getting what he gave him back. The master's response should not be taken lightly: *you evil, lazy servant! ... For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, Matthew 25.26, 29-30.

God doesn't judge us on our results, He calls us to use what we have. Burying our opportunities is *wicked and lazy*. Let us use what we have for the glory of God. Remember, *Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the growth*, 1 Corinthians 3.6

There is much to do, there is work on every hand. We must have the heart of Isaiah who said, *Lord, send me*, Isaiah 6.8.

For Thought and Reflection

1. How much are the demands of life keeping you from being available for use in God's service? What is your plan of action to make changes?
2. What can we learn from Acts 16.6-10 about the need to be flexible in molding our life around God's plans?
3. Who are some people you know who need help in bearing burdens? How can you help?

4. Who are some people you know who need encouragement to carry on? What can you say or do for them to build them up? (Hebrews 10.24)

5. What are some positive things you can say or do for the leaders of our congregation, thereby demonstrating your high regard for them as they care for your soul?

6. How are you working on becoming a more effective image bearer for the Lord?

7. How was Philip a participant in the providence of God? Peter?

8. What if these men had shirked their calling?

9. What is the purpose of the parable of the talents?

10. What can we learn from the spirit of Isaiah when he said, *Here I am Lord, send me.*