

THE STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

"When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept;
When as a youth I laughed and talked, time walked;
When I became a full-grown man, time ran;
When older still I daily grew, time flew;
Soon I shall find in traveling on, time gone."

Of course, time is passing at the same rate of speed that has always characterized it, but it does seem to get faster, doesn't it? When we were children time seemed to be so plentiful, but it does not seem so plentiful as it once did. There is a great scarcity of it. Yet, all of us have enough time to do all God requires of us. We have time to do his will if we but plan our lives and put a priority upon certain things. Some day we shall stand before God and give an account of the way we spent the time he allotted to us on this earth. Yes, we shall stand before him and turn in a time card. At that time will it be seen that we have been good stewards of the hours, the days, and the years that we lived on this earth?

Time has three chapters and each one of these is important. The attitude we have toward each one of these is also important.

The great chapter of the past is getting longer all the time. The link that connects us with the past is memory. How great and powerful is memory! Who is it that does not have a great storehouse of memories with which he spends many happy hours? Sometimes many sad hours are spent with memories. We can live the past in memory and in that sense the past is always ours. But there are some things about the past which we are not to remember if we would be happy and useful. The great apostle Paul said, "Forgetting the things that are behind." (Philippians 3:13) Many people are constantly unhappy because of some mistake they made yesterday, but no one should let the past haunt him and deter him from present usefulness. When we have done all we can to correct our mistakes we should forget them. God has said he will. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever." (Hebrews 8:12). There is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot wash away. Someone says, "But I have spent so much time in sin and my sins have been so grievous." That matters not. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7). Of course this does not mean that God unconditionally and indiscriminately bestows pardon, but it does mean that forgiveness is always available for every man who will come to the cleansing stream and receive God's proffered mercy. We are acting foolishly when we let the past ruin our happiness.

But while we are forgetting the mistakes of the past, we should also let the past be our servant. By experience we should have learned many things that will help us in the years ahead. There are thousands of lessons waiting to be gathered up and used. In a sense we can redeem the mistakes of the past by letting them teach us. The way we live **now** is the important consideration, but our attitude toward the past will determine to a great extent our ability to use the present to the best possible advantage.

In contrast with the people who are always looking back to the past with fear are those who dream of the past as a golden era that can never be equalled or surpassed. "When I was a boy" is the way some begin every sentence. Some suffer the loss of a loved one and spend the remainder of life pining over their loss. They leave a certain room and certain pieces of furniture just as they were when the loved one was with them . . . trying to recapture the past. It is good to have souvenirs, and it is all right to get them out and reminisce occasionally, but we should soon put them back in the trunk and go back to living today.

God's emphasis is on NOW. "Choose you this day whom you will serve." (Josh 24:15). "But exhort one another daily while it is called today." (Hebrews 8:13). "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow 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." (James 4:13-14). Jesus emphasized the importance of the present. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work:" (John 9:4).

The way we use today determines the kind of past we shall have tomorrow. Benjamin Franklin, in letters to a young tradesman, said, "Time is money." This is true, but man cannot do with time as he does with money . . . put it up for future use. He must use it now or never. In addition to the fact that time is money, we can well say, "Time is knowledge; time is power; time is salvation;" for it is the proper use of time that brings these blessings to us. He who kills time will in turn be killed by time.

We who hear the many excuses offered by people for their failures are often reminded of the excuse offered by the man who had permitted the prisoner to escape: "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." (1 Kings 20:40). Some parents say they are so busy that they cannot possibly bring their children to the Bible classes, and that they do well to be present for the hour of worship. Many young couples are so busy paying for a house, furniture, and a car that they

have no time for the Lord. The sick among us are neglected because we are too busy with a multitude of things. We often hear it said that everything is in such a whirl in this twentieth century that we just do not have time. When the facts are known it is found that too many jobs, too many clubs, too many parties, and too many recreational activities are the real time consumers. Too many of us permit ourselves to become mere puppets. We do not have the courage to say NO to certain things in order that we may have time for more important matters. There are the same number of hours in a day that there were in the time of the apostles. It takes fewer hours to make a living than at any previous time in the history of the world. The real trouble is that we do not have the courage to make decisions that will place first things first? When we resolve to place the kingdom of God first in our schedules, then certain activities will automatically be eliminated and others will naturally have precedence. We must learn when to say YES and when to say NO. There is a way of working out our schedules so that God will be first. If not, then God commanded an impossibility.

Let us ever remember that we are stewards of time and that we shall give an account for the way we use time. When the psalmist considered the eternity of almighty God and the frailty of human flesh, he uttered this petition: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Psalms 90:12). We all need to pray that prayer often.

Life's third chapter is the future. For every individual this chapter is becoming shorter every hour. When we contemplate the fact that eighty years from this day, at the utmost, all of us will be in eternity, we are made to realize more than ever the brevity of life. Our attitude toward the future, even as toward the past, also helps to determine our present usefulness. Paul said, "Reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark . ." (Phil. 3:13-14).

We are not to spend our time lamenting the fact that our earthly existence is so short, but we are to face the future with a confidence that we shall live as long as God lives. Faith is that which gives us victory over the future. Many destroy happiness by worrying about the future. They are afraid of what might happen to them. The doctors tell us of the many patients who crowd their offices imagining that they have heart trouble or some other terrible disease. They live in constant fear and dread. It has been said that "Cowards die many times before their death, but brave men die only once."

Even as some live in the past, so there are others who live in the future.

High school students think they will be happy when they get a car, a job, etc. When their parents (who have a car, a job, etc.) are heard, it is found that they plan to start living when they have paid off the mortgage on their home, when their children have finished college, etc. They are all refusing to live in the present. Those with bad habits are planning to quit after a little while. Many who are not Christians are planning to be, but they will wait a while yet. Procrastination, in addition to being the thief of time, is also the thief of souls. God speaks to man and says "NOW," but Satan urges that there is a "MORE CONVENIENT SEASON."

We should live as if this were our last day on earth for it may be. Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was asked, on his ninetieth birthday anniversary, how he would spend his life if he had it to live over. He replied, "One day at a time." There are those who say they would like to be Christians but they do not make the start because they are not certain they will be able to be faithful to the end of life. Jesus said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matthew 6:34). This was spoken in an effort to allay our needless anxieties and cares about the unknown tomorrow.

The person who assumes the proper attitude toward the past, and who lives well today, can face the future unafraid. This is the great consolation in having Jesus Christ as our constant friend and helper. He is the only one who can blot out your mistakes of the past, the only one who can make life worth living today, and the only one who can safely lead you into the unseen tomorrow. Can you truly sing "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine? The question is not, "Has he been yours at some time in the past?" It is not "Do you plan for him to be yours in some future day?" But is he yours now?