

Missed Opportunities -- Matthew 25:14-30

I read a story about a man who missed a great opportunity! It seems that his friend took him for a ride one day, way out in the country. They drove off the main road & drove through groves of trees to a large uninhabited expanse of land. A few horses were grazing, & a couple of old shacks remained. The friend, Walter, stopped the car, got out, & started to describe with **great vividness** the wonderful things he was going to build. Walter wanted his friend Arthur to buy some of the land surrounding his project, in order to get in on the ground floor!

But Arthur thought to himself: "Who in the world is going to drive 25 miles for this crazy project?" The logistics of the venture were staggering! Walter explained to his friend Arthur: "I can handle the main project myself, but it will take all my money. However, the land bordering it, where we are now standing, will in just a couple of years, be jammed with hotels & restaurants & convention halls, to accommodate the people who will come to spend their entire vacations here at my park." He continued: "I want you to have the first chance at this surrounding acreage, because in the next five years, it will increase in value 700 times."

As Arthur tells the story today: "What could I say? I knew he was wrong! I knew that he had let this dream get the best of his common sense, so I mumbled something about a tight-money situation, & promised that I would look into the whole thing a little later." "**Later on will be too late,**" Walter cautioned Arthur as they walked back to the car. "You'd better move on it right now!"

And so, **Art Linkletter** turned down the **opportunity** to buy up all the land that surrounded what was to become **Disneyland**. His friend **Walt Disney** tried to talk him into it, but Art thought he was crazy! **Art Linkletter missed a golden opportunity! Have you ever kicked yourself in the Seat of the Pants, because you missed a golden opportunity?**

Jesus tells a story about a man who missed an opportunity: It is recorded in Matthew's Gospel 25, beginning with verse 14. It is a story about a man who was going to take a trip. Before he goes, he calls together his servants, & gives them money to invest for him while he was gone. He gave five bags of gold to one man, two bags of gold to another, & one bag of gold to the last, dividing it in proportions to their abilities, & then he left on his trip.

The servant who received the five bags of gold began immediately to invest the money, & soon doubled it. The servant with two bags of gold also went right to work & he also doubled the money. But (according to verse 18) -- **the servant who received the one bag of gold, dug a hole in the ground & hid the master's money for safe keeping!**

After a long time their master returned from his trip, & called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of gold said: "Sir, I have doubled the amount." The master was full of praise. Next came the servant who had received the two bags of gold, with the report: "Sir, you gave me two bags of gold to invest, & I have doubled the amount." Again the master was full of praise. Then (according to verse 24, the servant with the one bag of gold came, & said: "Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant, & gathering crops you didn't cultivate. **I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth & here it is.**" But the master replied calling the servant lazy! He told him: "You should at least have put my money into the bank, so I could have some interest. Take the money from this servant & give it to the one with ten bags of gold."

Notice what the master says in verse 29 (**Matthew 25:29**). “For unto every one that hath shall be given, & he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” I ask you today: How are you investing the talents, the natural abilities, the skills, the spiritual gifts God has entrusted to you? Unless you use them, you may lose them! Don’t miss your opportunity to invest the gifts God has given you! **Missed opportunities!** Oh the peril of missed opportunities!

Has an opportunity ever knocked on your door & you were so caught up in other things, that it slipped through your fingers? It has more than likely happened to all of us! It is my sincere prayer for this New Year, that we would wake up to the opportunities around us! We don’t need to pray for more miracles; we just need to be more sensitive to the opportunities that God brings our way!

We missed an opportunity to get a certain job because we were not prepared. We missed an opportunity to minister to some one close to us, because we were too preoccupied. We missed an opportunity to make a positive difference in someone’s life. We missed an opportunity to be a blessing to someone who is hurting. We missed an opportunity to witness to a lost friend! We missed an opportunity to make an eternal difference in some person’s life, because we didn’t seize the opportunity. Why is it that some people seem to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way, while others allow opportunities to pass them by? It is easy to say: “Well, they were just lucky.” I don’t think **luck** has anything to do with it. Some people are just more sensitive to the opportunity!

Have you heard about the Shoe Salesman that went to Africa? He was there two weeks & wrote his company a letter saying: “Please bring me home. Nobody wears shoes over here.” They sent another salesman in his place; in a couple weeks he sent a letter back saying: “Please send all the shoes you can, because nobody here wears shoes, **everybody needs them!**” We have got to believe in **what** we are selling!

As we enter into a New Year, I want to challenge you with this thought: **You have the possibility to be a blessing in someone’s life every day!** In fact, there is opportunity all around you! Every day there are opportunities that come our way, to be a blessing to someone! We are surrounded by needs! **Today**, is your ministry! You may do it well, or you may do it poorly, but **what you do today is your ministry**. Don’t wait for someone else to be a blessing! **You** be a blessing! Don’t wait for something **big** to come along. Just be faithful in little things! The Church is built one block at a time. People are touched, one life at a time! Who can you touch today? Jesus said: “If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.”

The Bible is full of examples of people who missed golden opportunities: **The people of Noah’s day had a chance to come to the ark!** They saw the ark being built, but they were too busy with life; they had other things to do; they didn’t have time to listen to the preacher; they laughed at Noah; **but one day it started to rain;** they were not laughing anymore, & God shut the door of opportunity, & it was too late!

The people of Sodom & Gomorrah had a chance to repent! God was going to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom & Gomorrah, but before He did, He revealed His plan to Abraham. Abraham began to pray & intercede for the Sodom; God sent a messenger to warn them; when Lot told his son-in-laws to leave Sodom because God was going to destroy it, they didn’t take him seriously, & their opportunity to escape was lost!

The two thieves on the cross both had their opportunity! One thief realized that this was no ordinary man that was dying beside him; he looked at Jesus & said: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." The other thief said: "If you are really the Son of God, get us out of this mess!" He didn't want to serve God, he just wanted out of his discomfort! But **both men had an opportunity!**

2000 years ago, God sent His only Son into this world to become our Savior! It was such a wonderful event that Heaven could not remain silent. An angel announced His birth to some lowly shepherds on a hill side, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace, goodwill toward man." Isaiah had prophesied long before: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, & His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

You know something! I'm afraid that many times, even those of **us** who know Him, **don't fully realize what He came to do, & what He desires to do in our individual lives!** We get too busy with life; we get caught up in other things; we get preoccupied with other things; so much so that we miss our opportunity for Christ to work effectively in our lives!

John's Gospel tells us: "Although the world was made through Him, the world didn't recognize Him when He came. Even in His own land & among His own people, He was not accepted. **But to all who believe Him & accept Him, He gave the right to become children of God.**" **How**, how can you & I take greater advantage of the opportunities God has given us in this New Year? Let me give you three very brief thoughts: --

1. We Have to Realize Who We Are In Christ!

We have been redeemed; we have been adopted into God's family; we have been given a ministry, spiritual gifts, & we have the greatest news in all the world! Jesus Christ has given us the gift of Eternal Life! We've got to believe in what we are selling!

2. We Have to Realize that Christ through Us Can Make a Difference in a Person's Life!

We are the light of the world; we are the salt of the earth; & we are here to shine; we are here to make people thirsty for God! As we allow God to work in us & through us, we **can** make a difference in someone's life -- every day!

3. We Have to Realize that It Is Our Responsibility to Reach Out!

Let me tell you a story of a teacher who reached out, who seized an opportunity, & realized it was her responsibility to reach out!

Teddy Stallard certainly qualified as "one of the least of these." He was disinterested in school, musty, wrinkled clothes, hair never combed, one of those kids in school with a deadpan face, expressionless, sort of a glassy, unfocused stare. When Miss Thompson spoke to Teddy, he always answered in mono-syllables. Unattractive, unmotivated & distant, Teddy was just plain hard to like.

Even though his teacher said she loved all the students in her class the same, deep down inside she wasn't being completely honest. Whenever she graded Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure out of putting X's next to the wrong answers, & when she put the F's at the top of the paper, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy's records & she knew more about him than she wanted to admit.

The records read: -- **1st Grade:** "Teddy shows promise with his work & attitude, but poor home situation." **2nd Grade:** "Teddy could do better; mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home." **3rd Grade:** "Teddy is a good boy but too serious; he is a slow learner; his mother died this year." **4th Grade:** "Teddy is very slow, but

well behaved; his father shows no interest.”

Christmas came, & the boys & girls in Miss Thompson’s class brought her Christmas presents. They piled their presents on her desk, & crowded around to watch her open them. Among the presents was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift; but he had. Teddy’s gift was wrapped in brown paper, & held together with Scotch Tape. On the paper were written the simple words: “For Miss Thompson, from Teddy.” When she opened Teddy’s present, out fell a tacky rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, & half a bottle of cheap perfume.

The other boys & girls began to giggle & smirk over Teddy’s gift, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting on the bracelet, & putting some of the perfume on her wrist. At the end of the day, when school was over, & the other children had left, **Teddy lingered behind**. He slowly came over to her desk & said softly: “Miss Thompson ... you smell just like my mother, & her bracelet looks real pretty on you too.”

When Teddy left, **Miss Thompson got down on her knees & asked God to forgive her!** The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a New Teacher. Oh, it was **still** Miss Thompson, but Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher; she had become an **Agent of God!** She was now a person committed to loving her children, **& doing things for them that would live on after her!** She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones, & especially Teddy Stallard. By the end of the school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement; he had caught up with most of the class, & was even ahead of some.

She didn’t hear from Teddy for a long time, then one day, Miss Thompson received a note that read: “Dear Miss Thompson; I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard.”

Four years later another note came: “Dear Miss Thompson; They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The University has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard.” And four years later: “Dear Miss Thompson; As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M. D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month; the 27th to be exact. I want you to come & sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Love Teddy Stallard.”

Miss Thompson went to that wedding, & she sat where Teddy’s mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there; **she had done something for Teddy that he could never have done for himself!** She had seized the opportunity!

My friends, a New Year of opportunity has dawned upon us! In this New Year of 2015, don’t let opportunities pass you by! **Realize who you are in Christ!** -- **Realize that Christ through you can make a difference in someone’s life!** -- **Realize that it is your responsibility to reach out!**

In the shadow of this church, people are dying without Christ! In your very neighborhood, people are hurting! Don’t miss the opportunity to reach out to someone this year, & to make a difference in someone’s life!

The yearning of my heart -- is that I may know Christ better, that His power will work in my life, that I will take better advantage of the opportunity to serve Him more effectively! It is **not enough just** to escape a fiery hell; to

be saved from God's wrath; to call myself a Christian; to manage my guilt; to get a ticket to heaven; to squeak through heaven's gate! I long for more than just the bare minimum God has to offer. I long for more than what the average Christian seems to settle for.

My friends -- don't be an **ordinary** Christian; God has enough of them already! As for me, I long for **everything** God wants to give me. **I long for more! -- More than just enough!** In 2015, I earnestly want God to bend my will; to awaken my conscience; to break my heart, if need be; to transform my mind; to overcome my prejudices; to soar in my spirit; to conform me into His **glorious image**; to give me life more abundantly! In 2015, I long to take the opportunity, for me to be **saturated** in Jesus Christ! **Please -- dear God, in 2015, just give me more of Jesus!**

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January 4, 2015 -- Sunday Morning