

Don't Wait Until It's Too Late!

Acts 24:24-26

I. INTRODUCTION: I

I. 2 No doubt there are many sad statements in the Bible:

A. *Athenians*: On his second missionary journey Paul preached in Athens; he spoke of the “unknown God” who “gives to all life, breath, and all things.” (Acts 17:25) And, He “commands all men everywhere to repent,” because He will “judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (vv. 30-31)

Acts 17:32: “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some mocked**...”

B. *Israelites*: In the days just prior to the Babylonian Captivity; the Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah pleaded with Judah to repent.

Jer. 6:16: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.’ But they said, **‘We will not walk in it.’**”

Matt. 27:25: “And all the people answered and said, **‘His blood be on us and on our children.’**”

C. *Herod Agrippa II*: In Acts 26 the apostle Paul defended himself before the Roman governor Festus and king Herod Agrippa II. He reminded Agrippa that what had happened concerning Christ and the gospel “was not done in a corner,” and Paul knew that Agrippa believed the prophets (v. 27).

Acts 26:28: “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’”

2. ** Luke records a sad statement in Acts chapter 24 which will be the basis of our lesson:

A. In Acts 22 Paul was taken into custody by the Romans in Jerusalem.

B. In Acts 23 Paul defends himself before the Sanhedrin.

C. Paul confounds the council over the resurrection of the dead (23:6-10).

D. Some of the Jews band together and are determined “they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul” (24:12).

E. Paul’s nephew revealed the plot to Paul and the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:16-22).

F. Claudius Lysias puts Paul under the protection of “two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen” and sends him to Caesarea where “Felix the governor” is located (Acts 23:23-24).

G. In Caesarea, Paul again defends himself (Acts 24:1ff).

H. Paul appears before the Roman governor Felix several times.

I. On the occasion of interest, Paul “reasoned” with Felix “about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

J. Luke tells us Paul’s preaching made Felix “afraid”; and he answered Paul:

- **Acts 24:24-25:** “And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, and answered, *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*”
- (1) We know Felix had further conversations with Paul; for v. 26 tells us Felix “sent for him more often and conversed with him.”
 - (2) But, Felix sent and conversed with Paul for the wrong reason; “he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him.” (Acts 24:26)
3. ****** Sadly, there is no record of Felix ever talking again with Paul “about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.”
- A. That “convenient season” evidently never presented itself again.
 - B. Sadly, many are like Felix and put off obedience to the Lord, thinking ‘there’s time, time, time enough yet.’
 - C. It could very well be the “eleventh hour” and we don’t even realize it (Matt. 20:1-16)!
4. **3** Felix provides us with such an important lesson. We must not procrastinate insofar as our relationship with the Lord is concerned!

II. DISCUSSION:

Don’t wait until there is...

- I. **4** No remedy:
 - A. Have you known someone who got real sick, but refused to go to the doctor?
 - B. Some wait so long that when they do go for help it’s too late!
 - C. They’ve waited too long; their condition is now beyond help; it’s too late for any treatment to be successful.
 - D. The warning signs (i.e., symptoms) were there all along; perhaps, fatigue, fever, discomfort, pain, etc. — but they were ignored. How sad! (Cheryl at UF)
 - E. The Lord’s people in ancient times reached a point where there was no remedy.
 - (1) The Lord had been warning Judah, through the prophets, for years that they needed to repent and amend their ways; but they arrogantly ignored God.
 - (2) In 2 Chronicles 36; their king, Jehoiakim, is “bound...in bronze fetters” and carried “off to Babylon” by Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 6-7).
 - (3) Then an eight-year old boy, Jehoiachin, becomes king (v. 9) and he too “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” (v. 9)
 - (4) So, the Lord sends him off into Babylonian captivity (v. 10).
 - (5) Zedekiah becomes king (v. 11; Josiah’s youngest son, Jehoiachin’s uncle) and he too “did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD.” (v. 12); he “stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel” (v. 13)

(6) The people were no better! **2 Chr. 36:14:** “...all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.”

F. God’s longsuffering finally ran out; the Lord had done all He could for them.

2 Chr. 36:15-16: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, **till there was no remedy.**”

G. God brought a terrible judgment against them for their obstinance:

2 Chr. 36:17-20: “He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. 20 And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons...”

H. Don’t make the same mistake! Don’t wait until it’s too late! Until there is “no remedy”!

2 Pet. 3:9-11: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 **But** the day of the Lord **will come** as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,”

Don’t wait until your...

2. **5** Heart is darkened:

A. In the first chapter of the Roman letter, Paul described the Gentile world:

Rom. 1:21: “...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish **hearts were darkened.**”

B. Paul uses a similar description:

Eph. 4:17-19: “...the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

C. Have you ever been in total darkness?

(1) It’s impossible to find your way! If left in the darkness it’s terrifying! (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30: “outer darkness”)

(2) When we try to live without God we are in spiritual darkness.

- (3) When we try to live without the lamp and light of God's word; we cannot find our way (**Psa. 119:105**: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."; Jer. 10:23).
- (4) So many, even Christians, find themselves totally miserable; that inevitably happens when we push God from our lives (or keep Him at "arm's length").
- (5) There's no true peace of mind (Phil. 4:7).
- D. Don't allow yourself to be grouped with those whose heart "...is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:27; Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14).
- E. Don't wait until it is too late and you are cast into "outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25:30)

Don't wait until your...

3. **6** Conscience is seared:

A. Paul warns:

1 Tim. 4:1-2: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own **conscience seared** with a hot iron,"

- (1) To "sear" is the Greek word we get our English word "cauterize"; when you cauterize the flesh, you burn it and it becomes insensitive; it can no longer feel.
- (2) To sear one's conscience means you continually do things you ought not to do.
 - (a) Pretty soon you do those things and it doesn't even bother you one bit!
 - (b) Your conscience becomes insensitive.
- (3) When we love and obey God as we should, Paul says we have a "good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:5); which is how Paul describes the faithful young preacher Timothy (1 Tim. 1:19: "having faith and a good conscience").
- (4) When you have a good conscience, you can put your head down on your pillow at night and not worry (explain my bad conscience in the days of my youth).
- B. A good conscience is one that can tell right from wrong, feel pleasure when right is done and pain when wrong is committed.
 - (1) However, we can sear our conscience as if burning it with a branding iron!
 - (2) Our conscience becomes like the hide of an animal burned with a branding iron...numb, desensitized.
- C. Ephesians 4:19 is divine commentary on such folks: "who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."
 - (1) People who are searing their conscience say, "I can quit _____ (put in whatever sin you like) anytime I want."
 - (2) But as our conscience grows insensitive our bad habits become a rut we cannot get out of; because we've reached the point where we don't feel anymore!

“The only difference between a rut and a grave are the dimensions.”

—Ellen Glasgow

- (3) Our conscience then no longer acts as a governor on our behavior (e.g., meth heads).

“The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.”

—Samuel Johnson

- D. Don't wait until it is too late, & your conscience is seared! Eph. 4:19: “*past feeling*”

Don't wait until your...

4. **7** *Heart is hardened:*

- A. The Bible often talks about a *hardened heart*.

- B. To see the effects of such a heart, just read about Pharaoh:

Ex. 7:12b-14: “...Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. 13 And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and **he did not heed them**, as the Lord had said. 14 So the Lord said to Moses: **‘Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go.’**”

- C. A hardened heart is “*obstinate*” (Dt. 2:30); because it refuses to turn unto the Lord:

Ex. 7:14: “Pharaoh's heart is stubborn...” (NASB)

- D. Many are “*obstinate*,” or “*stubborn*”; when it comes to the Lord.

(1) Some know the truth; they've sat in services for many years; they know the truth; they know the Bible plan of salvation; but they stubbornly refuse to obey!

(2) Others have obeyed the gospel; but they stubbornly persist dabbling in sin (e.g., Joe G. and social drinking, smoking).

- E. Remember Zedekiah (I. E. (5)): **2 Chr. 36:13:** “...he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.”

(1) Do you know what happened to Zedekiah because of his hardened heart?

2 Kgs. 25:5-7: “And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. 6 So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. 7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.”

(2) Imagine the epitaph on Zedekiah's tombstone: “...he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.”

(3) Could a similar epitaph be engraved on your tombstone someday?

- F. We must always be on guard to keep our heart soft and pliable (spiritually speaking):

Heb. 3:13: “but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” cf. Heb. 10:25

- G. The hearts of men are like clay (Isa. 64:8; Jer. 18:4, 6).

- (1) The softer our heart, the easier for the Lord to work on (cf. Lk. 8:15; **Jas. 1:21**: "...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.>").
- (2) A life of sin so stiffens our heart we simply will not bend or yield to the potter, to the Father's will! What does the potter do to a piece of marred clay?!
- (3) The Hebrew writer quotes Psalm 95:8 three times as he exhorts us: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7)
- (4) The Hebrew writer also issues a stern warning in Hebrews 6:4-6:

Heb. 6:4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

- (a) Allowing our heart to harden is dangerous business! We can get to the point where we are so hardened we totally reject God!

Heb. 10:26-29: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"

- (b) We give up on ourselves and then God gives up on us! **Rom. 1:24:** "God also gave them up"; **v. 26:** "God gave them up"; **v. 28:** "God gave them over to a debased mind..."
- (c) Paul describes it this way in **2 Thessalonians 2:10-12:** "...those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned..."

H. Don't harden your heart against God's Word! Don't wait until it's too late and you end up worse than Zedekiah!

Don't wait until your...

5. 8 Death:

A. Unless the Lord comes first, what is said of Adam will be said of us, "...and he died" (Gen. 5:5).

- (1) "For as in Adam all die..." (1 Cor. 15:22). "...it is appointed unto men once to die..." (Heb. 9:27).

- (2) Death is the great equalizer; as one said, "In the end we all get that same shovel full of dirt thrown in our face."

"Death is a friend of ours; and he that is not ready to entertain him is not at home." *Sir Francis Bacon*

B. We have no way of knowing when death will come to us:

Eccl. 9:12: *“For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them.”* (Car crash last Sunday morning; 4/29/18 on Hwy. 46 that made us late to services took three lives! Were they planning to die that day?!)

(1) I’ve been to many funerals over the years.

(2) Those that died young (Tommy Paine, 8-years old), died at middle age (Miriam Thomas, 51-years old), and died in old age (Pearl West, 96-years old).

(3) None of them knew when it was coming!

C. We’ve all viewed the deceased at a funeral home. The dead are powerless!

Eccl. 8:8: *“No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war...”*

1 Cor. 15:43: *“It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.”*

D. When death comes, it will be too late to do anything about our spiritual condition; as the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 learned.

(1) He died, was buried, and in hades lifted up his eyes, being in torments. A great gulf was fixed. It was too late for him! His eternal fate was sealed!

(2) He wanted to go back and warn his five brothers; but Abraham told him, *“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”* (Lk. 16:31)

E. You and I are even more blessed:

Heb. 1:1-2: *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”*

F. Are you listening?! Don’t wait until it is too late, listen to Jesus today! Lk. 16:26

Don’t wait until...

6. 9 Christ comes:

A. The Lord promised, *“...I will come again...”* (Jn. 14:3).

B. His coming is as certain as death itself:

Heb. 9:27-28: *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him **He will appear a second time**, apart from sin, for salvation.”* He will come:

“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

(1) He will come *“...as a thief in the night...”* (2 Pet. 3:10).

(2) *“But of that day and hour knoweth no man...”* (Matt. 24:36).

(3) He will judge us when He comes again:

2 Tim. 4:1: “who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing”

2 Cor. 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Rom. 14:10-12: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ 12 So then **each of us shall give account of himself to God.**”

Matt. 25:31-32: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 **All the nations will be gathered before Him,** and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

Matt. 25:46: “these [lost, wicked, not obedient] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- C. His coming will bring about “the end.” Paul spoke of Christ’s coming and said, “Then cometh the end...” (1 Cor. 15:23-24). And,

Rev. 20:12: “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”

- D. When “the end” comes it’s too late to repent! **Rev. 20:15:** “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Don’t wait until the...

7. **10** Door is shut:

- A. In the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) the foolish virgins waited too long!
“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and **the door was shut.** 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ 12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’” (vv. 10-12).
- B. When the door is shut, you won’t have another opportunity!
- (1) Obviously the door is shut upon our death or when the Lord returns.
 - (2) However, your door may shut before you die!
 - (a) Felix’s door shut before his death! Acts 24:25
 - (b) Henrietta’s (woman I knew in Michigan) door shut before she died.
 - (c) Many things can happen to us that shuts the door for us before we die! (e.g., debilitating injury/illness, total hardening of our heart)
- C. The Lord is pleading for you to come NOW!

2 Cor. 6:2: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Matt. 11:28-30: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Rev. 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

- D. But someday He will shut the door; don’t let that door be slammed in your face! Don’t wait until it is too late! **Rev. 22:17:** “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him that heareth say, ‘Come.’ And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (KJV)

III. CONCLUSION: ||

- I. I’ve said it hundreds of times: “We don’t know how much time we have left.”
 - A. I fear that to many people those words simply “go in one ear and out the other.”
 - B. “Yea, yea; I’ve heard that many times before. So, tell me something new.”
 - C. The saddest funerals are the funeral of one who died “way before their time” (e.g., My 17-year old cousin who was struck dead by lightning).
 - (1) He hadn’t even reached the “prime of life.”
 - (2) Many die “way before their time.”
 - (3) Such a sudden end can happen to you! Don’t scoff!
2. ** One of my favorite songs has this line in it:

“And then one day you find ten years have got behind you, no one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.” *Time* by Pink Floyd

 - A. You may be young, “healthy as an ox,” brimming over with energy and “ready to take on the world.”
 - B. But one thing is undeniably true: Every day you live you are one day closer to death.
3. ** Don’t wait until it is too late!
 - A. In the book of Acts, folks were baptized “*the same day*” (Acts 2:41); “*the same hour of the night*” (Acts 16:33).
 - B. You may not have another day; you may not have another hour! (**Prov. 27:1:** “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”; Lk. 12:16-20; Jas. 4:13-17).
 - C. Obey this day; this very hour! Jesus is our only hope! (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 7:10-11)

Adapted from an article, *Don't Wait Till It's Too Late!*, by John Isaac Edwards, *The Terre Haute Speaker*, Vol. 7, No. 17; April 29, 2018.