

WASTED OPPORTUNITIES

JAY LOCKHART

One of the most important battles fought in the Civil War was the battle of Shiloh. Two great armies maneuvered in an area near Savannah, Tennessee, and finally the battle was begun. The battle at first went against the Northern troops. Under General Johnston the South drove the army of the North back to the bank of the Mississippi. Then General Johnston was mortally wounded, and the command passed to General Beauregard. Because the day was far spent and the men were tired, Beauregard decided that he would wait until the next day to finish the battle. That night General Grant and his Northern troops were re-enforced. The next day they pushed the Southern army back. The South retreated to Vicksburg. Too many people were lost on both sides for anyone to claim the victory at Shiloh. But it is thought that Shiloh was the beginning of the end for the Southern cause.

Though I am not sorry that the war turned out the way it did, it might have been different if Beauregard had pushed his advantage. It was the story of wasted opportunities. Chapter 9 of Romans also has as its theme, "Wasted Opportunities."

Paul has developed the great doctrine of condemnation and justification in the first 8 chapters of Romans. This section reaches a climax in Romans 8 as he shows us the great blessing of being in Christ Jesus. When we study carefully the first 8 chapters of Romans, we conclude that the only reasonable response to what God has done is to throw ourselves before God and give Him the best we have because He has given us the best He has.

I. WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES

Before Paul applies this great doctrine of justification, he gives the information recorded in Romans 9, 10, and 11. Paul seemingly says, "I have developed the doctrine of justification. I am about to apply this great doctrine to your everyday life. But before I do, I want to present some material on the nation of Israel." Chapters 9, 10, and 11 address the privilege of the Jews. The privilege simply stated is this: For fifteen hundred years, the nation of Israel had been God's chosen people. He had chosen them not because they were the greatest of all nations. To the contrary, He chose them when they were no nation at all. He had brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage; He had nurtured them under Moses in a wilderness for forty years. He had given them a written law by which to live, the heart of which was the Ten Commandments. He had brought them to the promised land of Canaan. Upon the death of Moses Joshua led them to victory in the land of Canaan. They came into the land and dwelt in it. All of the land promises were fulfilled to Israel. Before Joshua's death he called the people of Israel together and said, "Not one good thing of all the things that God has promised to us has failed; all have been fulfilled." They possessed the land, and they dwelt in it.

God nurtured them through ups and downs until finally, in cooperation with God, Jesus of Nazareth came into the world through this nation. According to Galatians 4:4, in the fullness of time "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." Jesus was a part of Israel. That is one of the reasons God kept the nation

intact. The Messiah was the God-man, the perfect combination of deity and humanity. If we should ask ourselves, "How does God become a man?" the answer is seen in the person of Jesus Christ. He came into the world as no one else has ever been born. He existed before He came into the world. When He came He was born miraculously. Mary, His mother, was with child of the Holy Spirit. No man was His father. Jesus' deity was demonstrated by His perfect life, the way He taught. His miracles, and the voice of God which spoke three times from heaven designating Him as God's only begotten Son. The supreme evidence of who He was came when He was crucified on a Roman cross between two thieves and on the third day arose. I believe Him to be all that He claimed to be. Faith is not a leap into the dark, for faith is based upon evidence. He came and demonstrated who He is.

When the church He promised to build came into existence on the first Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection, three thousand of Israel were obedient to the faith. Soon that number grew to five thousand. Luke tells us that the disciples were multiplied. The good news of Jesus was first preached to Israel, and the first followers of Christ were Israelites.

When Paul develops his theme in Romans, he shows us that men who were of the Gentile people stood in the presence of God undone and lost because even though they did not have a written law from God, they rejected the light that God gave them. Therefore, all people, regardless of who they are, are lost and dependent upon someone else who is perfect. That one perfect person was the person Jesus Christ. "No one comes unto the Father," Jesus said, "but by Me."

II. WASTED OPPORTUNITIES

After fifteen hundred years of being the chosen of God Paul announces in Romans that they are not all Israel who are of Israel. He declares that men who are in Christ are the Israel of God. Paul's emphasis is that the people of Israel had rejected God. All that God had done in working with the nation was designed to bring them to the Christ. But the Christ was rejected by most of the nation. Romans 9:1-3 says,

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Paul has two witnesses to the truth of what he is saying. One is his conscience. The other is the Holy Spirit. Paul believed that what he wrote for God was written by the direction of the Holy Spirit. He was heartbroken. Why? Because the nation of Israel had rejected the Christ.

After speaking of his heartbreak, he moves to the wasted opportunities. He speaks in verse 4 of the great privileges that the nation of Israel had. After all, was any other group of people called God's people? Did God give a written law to anyone, save Israel? Did God nurture any nation as He did that nation? What wasted opportunities!

What were these privileges that belonged to the nation of Israel?

Adoption

Number one is found at verse 4. He says, "Who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption." *Adoption*. God had adopted the nation of Israel to be His own people. He said through His prophet Hosea, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." In Exodus 4:22 God affirmed that He was their God and they were His people.

Glory

The second blessing is "the *glory*." They had experienced God's own glory. First, the glory of God came to the Israelites from Mt. Sinai when He gave the law; but they saw the glory of the law as He led them by the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day. They saw His glory as it settled upon the tabernacle, their tent of meeting.

The Covenant

There is a third blessing or privilege: "The *covenants*." A covenant is an agreement between two parties involving promises. God made covenants with the fathers of Israel and then with Israel herself.

The Law

Next is the giving of "the *law*." The blessing of Israel included the law that governed them given at Mt. Sinai.

The Temple Service

Next he says, "And the temple *service*." The Levitical service, the service of the priesthood around the tabernacle and later the temple, was theirs.

The Promises

The next word is "the *promises*." All the promises pertaining to the coming Messiah were made to the nation of Israel.

The Fathers

A seventh blessing or privilege is "the *fathers*." He says, "*Whose are the fathers, . . .*" He refers to the patriarchs, those who had led the way and blazed the trails.

The Messiah

The eighth blessing is that through Israel "*is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever*." Jesus was born of the nation of Israel.

After enumerating these wonderful blessings, we are impressed with the wasted opportunities, for the nation rejected Messiah.

CONCLUSION

By way of application I would ask, "What about us? What about our privileges? What

about our opportunities?" Let me enumerate three blessings or opportunities that belong to us today. First, there are family and friends. We are surrounded by people whom we love and by whom we are loved. It is so easy to squander opportunities to speak a word of encouragement, or a word of love. One time Jesus said, "Me you have not always." That is true of our loved ones and friends. If we are ever going to say, "I love you," if we are ever going to give a hand to help, we should do it now. We have the opportunity, but the opportunity may be wasted.

Second, there is the call of Christ, which says to all of us, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Many are still rejecting His call. Others are wanting to accept the call but on the basis of their own terms. Jesus shows that men who are born of the water and Spirit are in His family. We must give serious attention to His call.

Third, there is the opportunity for faithfulness. How many people began to follow Christ and then after a while gave up? In giving up, faithfulness is gone.

You and I are surrounded by opportunities and privileges. We must not waste them. May we give ourselves to the very best that is within us in fulfilling the opportunities we have.

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