

Take God's Opportunity

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Acts 1¹⁻⁸/Esther 4⁹⁻¹⁶/John 7¹⁻⁹

In the days before modern harbours, a ship had to wait for the flood tide before it could make it to port. The term for this situation in Latin was *ob portu*, that is, a ship standing over **off a port**, waiting for the moment when it could ride the turn of the tide to harbour.

The English word *opportunity* is derived from this original meaning. The captain and the crew were ready and waiting for that one moment for they knew that if they missed it, they would have to wait for another tide to come in.

God is a God of opportunity. He delights in giving us **opportunities** to know and to love Him. Throughout the Bible this is a constant theme – I will give you another chance – another opportunity. Perhaps you've come here today thinking – 'I've blown it, I really stuffed up – I've wasted my life – I've wasted my opportunity.' I want you to know that in God this is never the case. For Him, every day is new, every moment, a new opportunity. Yes, we may have wasted some years, perhaps half a life. But in God that is simply a yesterday and He is willing to pack all His promises into your tomorrow. And not only this but He can redeem our past, He can make something better even of wasted opportunities. This is why God says in Joel...

**²⁵"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—
the great locust and the young locust,
the other locusts and the locust swarm—
my great army that I sent among you. (Joel 2)**

Israel had wasted so many opportunities with God. She had squandered her birthright and slandered God's Name among the nations but now God was promising that despite this, despite all the waste God would, in restoring her, make up for this terrible waste. God is a God of wonderful restoration if we will **take the opportunities He places before us**. How often, I wonder, have we missed the tide – waited too long, not taken the risk to ride something we cannot control? **Taking the opportunity means giving oneself to the tide, risking ourselves to the uncontrollable surge of God's tide**. And this is what we find the gathered disciples in Jerusalem doing on that day we call Pentecost.

They had been told to wait for God's tide – wait for the opportunity – wait for God to move what no man could – a tide of supernatural expression that would begin to sweep the world

before it. **And God says to us today – will you also ride my tide – are you prepared to take your opportunity?**

God is a God of endless opportunities. I have come to believe that God places these before us every day. Yes some are small opportunities – opportunities to speak a word of encouragement and love into a life a being hounded by the devil’s condemnation and hatred. Opportunities to listen with God’s ears and heart to a life made hopeless by a world that seems not to care. Opportunities to offer practical help and support to a life made poor by material lack and a sense of deep unworthiness that goes with all types of poverty. Everyday God places before us opportunities and, frankly, we miss them. We miss myriads of them as we go about our busy days, completing tasks which we see as important but which the Spirit of God is not in.

Of course some are bigger opportunities. Opportunities to serve God in sacrificial and significant ways. Opportunities to go deeper with God, to become trained pilots, understanding the way the tides work and how to ride them, helping others to begin taking the opportunities God sets before them. Opportunities to choose to sacrifice for the sake of even bigger opportunities. Often a huge opportunity becomes available only at the cost of another significant but smaller opportunity. Jesus made it plain that there would be those who gave away the opportunity to be married for the sake of God’s great opportunity. He also said that some would become materially poor, face persecution, leave home and culture behind and even forgo the ultimate opportunity – life itself, for the sake of the greater opportunities available in God. But He also said that whatever opportunities we gave up for His sake, He would restore many times over if not in this life then in the next.

While there are many opportunities there is still only one tide. Our greatest problem these days isn’t that the tide has changed but that we have too many other tempting and delightful looking opportunities. And with our eyes on these we can’t possibly be ready for the tide of God. We will miss it and have to wait again.

[7]Os Guinness tells a wonderful story in his book *The Devil’s Gauntlet* about Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev used to tell of a time when there was a wave of petty theft in the Soviet Union. To curtail this the authorities put up guards around the factories. At one timber works in Leningrad, the guard knew the workers in the factory very well. The first evening, out came Pyotr Petrovich with a wheelbarrow and, on the wheelbarrow, a great bulky sack with a suspicious-looking object inside. “All right, Petrovich,” said the guard, “what have you got there?” “Oh, just sawdust and shavings,” Petrovich replied. “Come on,” the guard said, “I wasn’t born yesterday. Tip it out.” And out came nothing but sawdust and shavings. So he was allowed to put it all back again and go home. When the same thing happened every night of the week the guard became frustrated. Finally, his curiosity overcame his frustration. “Petrovich,” he said, “I know you. Tell me what you’re smuggling out of here, and I’ll let you go.” “Wheelbarrows, my friend,” said Petrovich, wheelbarrows.”

How easily we get distracted from the tide by the wheelbarrows in our life – the helpful things which are so obvious and, yet, which **keep us from God!** Tell me what if, on Pentecost day, Peter, worried about how all the disciples and his own family were going to eat – had gone fishing? Where would the Church be if that had happened? How often work can be for us **a wheelbarrow!** Where would the Church be if on the day of Pentecost the disciples had declared a holiday and decided to take everyone out of Jerusalem down to the river for a break because, after all, we've been here 40 days and everyone needs a break? Perfectly reasonable you say, yes, a great idea! How often rest can be for us **a wheelbarrow.** And yes, of course we need rest. I am not decrying rest. God came to give us rest. But Jesus said, Come to Me and **I will give you rest, rest for your souls.** What is the greatest rest a ship waiting for the tide to take it into the harbour can have? **[Yes! To enter the harbour.]** How many souls have rested from God and found their life stranded in stormy waters? How many lives are spent resting in front of TV whilst children walk out of the Church disillusioned by the lack of communication and interest shown in their lives? **What are the wheelbarrows of our lives? What is Satan smuggling in or perhaps out of our life in the form of some, so called, minor distraction?**

The Spirit comes that we might have true rest. 40 days of prayer, 1 sermon – 3000 converts. The Spirit did on Pentecost what years of evangelism programmes might accomplish today. I know what looks like less work to me! But if we are to enter that rest there are three things we must take into account, three things which allow us to catch the tide of God's Spirit. They are

1. The time

2. The place and

3. The price.

For Jesus there is a time for Him. It is not any time but a special time.

⁶Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. (John 7)

If God had a time for Jesus then He has a time for you – A time when He wants to lift you up and to restore you and to heal you and fill you anew with the Holy Spirit. He certainly had a time for the Church. The whole church prayed for 40 days. Why? **For such a time as this!** A young woman once saved the whole Jewish nation. Her name was Esther and as a orphan she was raised by her uncle Mordecai, a faithful and perceptive man. Mordecai encourages Esther to enter a beauty contest the prize for which is to become the next Queen and once she has won he uncovers a terrible plot by a scheming ancient Nazi called Haman. Having discovered this Mordecai goes to Esther and pleads with her to approach the King and tell him what's going on. This is a very dangerous manoeuvre since the King doesn't like people simply coming to him uninvited and has threatened to kill anyone who does. In answer to this Mordecai utters these immortal words...

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape.¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4)

Time and tide so the old saying goes, waits for no man. God has a time for us. **Our problem is to recognise that time.** And here’s the key – here’s the secret. **Take every opportunity!** Don’t let any opportunity go by. Feed your soul. Follow the action of the Spirit. Open yourself at every opportunity. Sometimes it may turn out to be wrong. But this is how God works. There’s an old saying which is bandied about in Christian circles which is Carpe Deum – Seize the day. Take the opportunity. When the tide starts rolling – jump in – God is there!

God has a place where His tide is coming in. God, it seems, doesn’t bring the tide in everywhere at once. He works specifically and geographically. And the place God anoints is where His people have chosen to wait for Him. In Acts it is no coincidence that God’s Spirit was poured out in Jerusalem for this was the place the gathered disciples had waited in obedience to the command of Jesus. Together they had sought Him and worshipped Him there and **there** was where the Spirit of God chose to bring the tide in. It was, for many who heard the outpouring of tongues, something of a coincidence. They had not planned to hear God’s Word in their own tongue given by people who did not even know their language. They had not waited on God. They had not obeyed Jesus. **But they were in that place and because they were there they too caught the tide of God’s Spirit.**

Put yourself in the place where God’s Word and God’s Spirit are and you too will catch the tide. Avoid these places and the tide will roll on without you.

There is a price to pay. God desires our love and loyalty. God desires our hearts. If we are waiting for the tide, we cannot be chasing distant shores elsewhere. We must wait in a specific place and for a specific time. Don’t get me wrong. We may run from God but He will never desert us. However, we will miss the tide. If I am studying, I can’t be partying night and day as well. If I am training for a marathon I can’t be sitting watching tele and pigging out. If I am committed to a wife I can’t be committed to someone else as well. In all things there is a price. God is no different. **He doesn’t ask for what we can’t give. But we can’t give to Him what we give to something else.** Let me repeat that... **He doesn’t ask for what we can’t give. But we can’t give to Him what we give to something else.**

God has a tide for you to catch. It is the tide of His Holy Spirit. There is a time when He will suddenly open the flood gates for us but we must be prepared to wait for Him. We will also need to be where he calls us and where His tide is flowing. Are we prepared to shift to find that place? Finally it will require of us a price – the price of commitment to His love, belief in His love, faith that His love is the love you truly need and desire. We cannot be on time and at the right place without paying a price.