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## THE REMORSE OF NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES

I Kings 20:35-43

### Introduction:

Life is but brief and yet it is full of opportunities for usefulness. And these opportunities often correspond to our position as well as our means and abilities. God expects from no man what he has not given him power to do. The man who is wise to see, can promptly act when the opportunity presents itself and will win success. Not to do so and to carry out your duty speaks of weakness. And will bring disappointment, suffering, and remorse.

My subject today deals with the parable of the wounded prophet. A certain noteable prisoner has been captured. His safe keeping is of highest importance. Therefore a particular soldier has been singled out from all of his fellows to perform this task. The soldier will feel honored at being so trusted. But if this is a great honor, it also carries with it a great responsibility. So important is this task, that he is warned that if the prisoner is allowed to escape, and an unpayable fine will be assessed against him or else his own life must be given in place of the prisoner.

The parable goes on to tell us how the soldier responds to this opportunity. He fails to measure up and when he is asked for his prisoner, he cannot deliver the prisoner. The man that had been placed with him has been permitted and allowed to escape.

Now this case as pointed out in the parable was not because the guard was overpowered. It was not even because the task was an impossible one which he had. But the man who was honored with the responsibility claimed he did not have time to discharge it.

V. 40 " While thy servant was busy here and here, he was gone. "

Now this is the old, old story. And I think it has something very definite to say to us today.

Ben hadad - 32 Kings alliance against Israel -  
Drinking Party - long party - Israel defeated -

The parable is very exciting in that it tells about a prophet who feels that it is necessary for him first to be wounded. And with some difficulty, he gets himself wounded. V. (35) He would not wound himself with his own hands, so he asked one of his brother prophets, one of his neighbors, if he would smite him.

But he was not willing to do this. The man now refused to do his responsibility there. And he was soon over taken by a lion and put to death. He said if somebody must do it, you must get somebody else. I cannot strike my friend. He was slain by a lion in V. (36)

Now this is to show something of the disobedience of Ahab, the King. Now if a good prophet was slain and punished in this way, what will be God's judgement upon Ahab for letting the enemy go.

v37

V. 36 Finally the prophet was wounded and he disguised himself with ashes, so that the King might not know him. Now all of this parable has to do with the sparing of Ben Hadad, King of Syria. And as the prophet tells him about this, a prisoner being taken in battle, committed to his custody and he had authority over him - just as King Ahab had authority over the Syrian king. That while he was busy here and there, he let the King go. He let the enemy go. And it was all because he made a covenant with him, a contract with him. Now God had ordained that this enemy - that Ahab had neglected a known duty and let this man go.

We must recognize that there are opportunities which occur and call us to do great work for God. There are times that will come when we shall be made painfully conscious. I think the opportunities that we have neglected - just as Ahab. And we'll find perhaps bitter remorse perhaps because of this neglect. The very remarkable condition necessary to this parable was to tell this story which is an old, old story.

The man that was entrusted to the keeping, because Ahab had been careless - he had been promised victory over the enemy, and he let him go unpunished. He had not fulfilled the will of God.

And the prophet simply says, thy servant was ~~blame~~ here and there. He had (plainly neglected) the command of God.

### I. He Had A Particular Task Assigned To Him

v. 39 That is the first prominent thing that I find in this parable. That he had the task of blotting out the enemy of Syria. And in this way, he was to help preserve himself and preserve God's people.

He was set free from all other things at that time, that he might give himself to this one thing. He had a business that was his very own.

What was true of Ahab is true of everyone of us. You have a God-given responsibility, task, and assignment.

But so many are like the small boy who was accustomed to carry a written excuse to his teacher when for some reason he had to miss a day from school, or had to be late. One day the teacher asked him to bring his birth certificate. When he came to school the next day, but the lad forgot it. Therefore, when he reached school he hurried to his teacher to tell her, "I forgot my excuse for being born." Now that is a type of excuse or forgetfulness that is all too common.

But even though you forget, I am convinced that God has purpose for every life. And he gives to every man his work. Everywhere you look in this wonderful world in which we live, we see the marks of intelligent planning. Everything - if you look through a microscope or a telescope, you merely affirm what the Psalmist said, the Heavens declare the glory of God.

For example, this season of the year - there will be flights of birds coming from it's wintery home to the land of summer. A climate that is satisfying to their surroundings. The wild goose will make his flight - going South. Coming from the frozen North. All of this is marked out with a plan and a purpose and God who so planned these lesser things has well planned the supreme important things in your life and in my life.

We know that God has a definite task for everyone of us because that is clear in His teachings.

Read the (Old) Testament story about Jeremiah. He tells how he goes down to the Potter's House where he would hear the word of God. And the prophet is obedient - he goes to that establishment and his eyes at once are fixed upon three different objects.

First, there was the potter.

Second, there was the wheel, which he worked.

Third, there was the clay.

Now the potter was working and the prophet looked on. And he saw the clay and he began to realize that that clay was made into something beautiful. It was in the mind of the potter and the potter was not working at random. And in your hands and my hands - there is the clay.

In the (New) Testament, we find there is nothing more evident than the life of Jesus was lived not as he wanted to live, but according to a purpose, a plan, and a task.

"My meat, he declared, is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work."

He had a great sense of mission. His own life then had a plan. So has yours and so has mine. And he gave Jesus work to do. And he gives a particular task to you and to me. My Father has sent me, even so, send I you.

The Bible teaches that all through the pages of history, this was true. After <sup>David</sup> he had served his own generation by the will of God, and layed unto his Father's, and fell onto sleep. David's life was strong and useful as he tried to carry out the business that God had placed in his hands to do.

A man is free to mar or to miss, or to refuse the great opportunities and tasks which God has given.       E      E      E      

## ✓ II. He Knew What His Task Was

It is very important that a man know God's will for his life. Ahab knew what his responsibility was and what God's will was concerning this situation. And the parable of the wounded prophet points out the fact that Ahab did not fail. Because he knew what God wanted done.

There are some people that never seem to find out the place or the scheme of things - they never discover their own business. By this, I mean that God will give us a (blueprint) for our lives. Now I (do not) think that you are going to find things printed out like a (computer) might give it to you. I believe he is going to give us indications what our task might be through our convictions. That we might say to this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world.

✓ Just (how) does a man go about discovering what God's will is and his task in the world.

First, I think a man must ~~Make~~ make a definite dedication to God. This is man's highest obligation - to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is every man's duty to put himself, the best that he has and knows, into God's hands. Yield yourself unto God. Now this is the very least that we can do - to become Christians. And to dedicate our lives to God.

God promises his definite guidance in all ways if we acknowledge him. And he will direct thy paths. Now to some people, God may speak through the voice of need. There are others who will hear a call - to some opportunity for service. But to be sure, God will let them know about it.

The great decision concerning what to do with your life is yours. It may be a base hit, a home run, or a strike out -- but you swing the bat. And you run the bases. So it depends upon how you react to God's guidance. God gives us a step at a time. And we may see only a part of that design.

A person came for guidance to Bishop Taylor Smith about a problem on guidance. And the Bishop wrote - drop me a post card when God guides you (two steps) at a time. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God. To them that are called according to His purpose. Now this does not mean that we are going to be able to see the end from the beginning. But it does mean, as I have said, that we are going to first make a dedication to God.

Samuel F. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was asked a question - Professor Morse when you were making your experiment yonder in your room in the university - did you ever come to a stand, and (not know) what to do next. Oh yes, more than once. And at that time, what did you do next. I may answer you in confidence Sir, said the professor - but it is a matter, which the public knows nothing. Whenever I could not see my way clearly, "I prayed for more light." Yes, I may tell you - that when the honors came to me from America and Europe on account of the invention which

bears my name, I never felt as though I deserved it. I had made a valuable application of electricity. Not because I was superior to other men but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, <sup>that it</sup> must be revealed to someone, and was pleased to reveal it to me.

In view of the facts, you are not surprised because of his definite dedication to God.

✓ Second, you may know it by counsel. I believe that God guides through the counsel of Christian friends, who will help us.

✓ Third, I believe we will know through common sense. Our own intelligence will tell us what our contribution is to be. Every man is under solemn obligation to make an effort in building a better world.

Mary made her priceless contribution in the house of Simon. What part did Judas play. The part of a critic. Now it takes little brains to tear down and destroy. But plain common sense tells us it is our business to co-operate. And to go to work.

Of times a church will be used to help individuals to discover God's will. It was very urgent back in 1841 a church needed a preacher. And they even licensed a man to exercise his gifts prior to his personal consent. For example, J. R. Graves was licensed by Mt. Freedom Baptist Church in Ky. Both without his knowledge and consent. The church soon after called for his ordination.

In 1890 the Baptist Church in Whiteright, Texas expressed its strong conviction that God had called a gifted young man in their midst to the Gospel ministry - Geo. W. Truitt who was determined to be a lawyer. He finally yielded to the insistent people of the church. That he be ordained. And he came to feel that God had spoken

to him through the voice of the church.

In the increasing need of preachers and missionaries, and ministers of education, does not the voice of the church need to be heard more often on this matter. That God may speak to individuals through the decision and the vote of the church. That young people might seriously consider God's call to them. Now this does not mean that they are going to manufacture a divine call but clearly it helps youth to clarify what it means for God to speak to an individual. And it urges upon them the importance of giving consideration to it.

The safest place for a man is in the center of God's will. It is the most rich rewarding place. And by it, we can know that it is a happy place. God uses a number of means to help individuals come to know what his task is. For example, the Christian home. Regular attendance at church - Worship Services. In Sunday School and Training Union. Each of these contribute a great deal to people coming to know God's will.

And this is where so many parents they get busy here and there - and they forget that that child is going to be (10 years) of age only once. And that's it. And when that is past, that is gone. I believe with all my heart that God would have us to use all of these means that men may come to know His will.

I believe also, that God will use every useable thing that any of his children will dedicate to him. Sometimes we wonder, about such poor Christian workers. But this is all that God has to work with. And he needs dedication and you need to know His will.

*Had Particular Assignment -  
He knew what his task was -*

### III. Why Did He Fail In His Task

Now just why did Ahab fail in his task. Why is it that so many of you fail in your task. A lots of people talk about things - but it really doesn't come out of their hearts.

Let me remind you that the church may be knocked into pieces as a ship but there will be enough to gett to shore because God says He is going to come for His Church and he is going to stand by his church. The church is going to be here when Jesus comes back again. There will be somebody living holy. I don't care how some of you live and I don't care how some of you feel. There are going to be a few who are still going to be standing when he comes. You can backslide, and you can be some place else, I know a lot of people who think they have already got into the Promise Land. And they sit down, cross their legs, and get fat. But I want to tell you that there is still work to do. And it takes more than a big testifier and a big talker. And a whole lot of conversation.

Now Ahab did not fail because his task (was impossible) as the prophet pointed out in this parable. He did not fail because he was a deliberate trader to his country. He did not accept a bribe for the release of the prisoner.

v. 40 No, the Bible says, he just (simply) got too busy. That he forgot his own task. He was busy here and there.

Now it is our privilege to go right where he went wrong. I think today (if) I were a young person, I would make it my business to do the task which God assigned me. I think if I was a young parent today, I would see to it that I'd fulfill my task and mission in a Godly way in rearing my child in the proper way.

Imagine the great shock when this prophet told him that they captured a prize prisoner and had held him. And he was not surprised at being over come. Because the enemy was stronger than the guard. It was not because it was in the dark of the night.

No, he did not escape because he was over powered. He did not escape because he was surprised but because he was too busy to watch. Too busy!

Now somebody would say, too busy doing what? What task did you find more important than saving your country, than saving your whole life - and the man was going to be under sentence of death. How foolish!

This was the whole thing wrong with the fig tree. Jesus cursed it not because it was loaded with poison. It had nothing but leaves on it.

Now the man could not plead that he was ignorant. Neither can you. He understood perfectly well. He knew it was life or death. He knew, as most of us, that our greatest need in the moral realm is not more knowledge - our greatest need is to live up to what we already know. The reason you are selfish, the reason you are Godless, is not because you do not know that. But it is because you are unwilling to do better.

There is not a man here who does not know enough to do his duty. It may be that you do not know exactly what the Lord wants you to do. It may be that you do not know the exact task at this moment. But you can be sure of one thing, you know the difference between right and wrong and you better enlist on the side of right. Make that your particular task.

Men are worthless today not because they do not know what to do.

Ahab didn't fail because he lacked the ability. He was not over powered by super numbers. And he didn't show any wounds trying to keep the prisoner.

I think a lot of times people fail because they lack not the ability. We have

reasonable ability to do the task which God has for us. Now, all of you probably couldn't be great painters, singers, etc. But there isn't any use for me to tell you that. You can persist - but you will never succeed.

But you can do everything that God wants you to do. I cannot do your task and you cannot do mine.

In the next place, Ahab did not fail because he was <sup>idle</sup> idle. He did not really fail because he was lazy. Now I know a lot of people are wrecks because of their laziness. And that is a deadly sin to overcome. But he was an idol.

Why did this man fail. He was busy. That is the word about himself. As our servant was busy here and there, he was gone. Though he was busy, he was not busy at his own task.

So many times and so many things that you do - you may have many engagements to keep. You may have many functions to attend. And you may have many burdens to carry. All of this, and you cannot do your duty.

Do you know of anybody like that. Did you keep your prisoner. No, I was busy. Busy at what? Do you know of anything that is more important than obeying the orders of Jesus Christ.

You have allowed the secondary things to absorb you to the neglect of the primary things. Things that he was working at here and there, those unnamed tasks, that he was performing. I am sure that many of them were not all together harmless. And they may have been useful in some ways. But the trouble was they robbed him of the privilege of doing the best.

The trouble was with the Prodigal in the far country - was not simply that he

was in the hog pen. He might have been in Paris and have been as bad off. He was just missing the privilege of being in the Father's house.

Now the sin of most of you, I fear, is not that you are so vicious in your wrong doing. But you are choosing the second best. I read the story of an insane man who spent all of his time sewing pieces of cloth together. The thread he used had no knot in the end of it so nothing was ever accomplished. Now there is no harm in such sewing. But the tragedy of it is the trifling things that rob us of the privilege of doing something better.

The trouble of many of our lives today, we are not engaged in the great things. It is these minor things that take all of our time.

You go to (work) ~~slow~~ days a week. You are in earnest about (amusing) yourself with a thousand different recreational ideas. You do a thousand and one decent and respectable things. But while you are busy here and there, the peace of God slips out of your life. While you are busy here and there, the peace of God is in Sunday School - which you neglect. You neglect the Church.

While you are busy here and there, you neglect your interest in reading the Bible. You forget even how to pray. Some of you neglect your sons and daughters. And you stumble along through life because of your failure to live up to your task.

A farmer in the springtime may be too busy to plow and to sow his seed. He has neglected his task.

Now you do not want to fail in your Spiritual task for many reasons. It will help you with your physical health. I think of many people today who have turned aside to the ways of evil. And the Devil has the better of them. Now it is not because they lack anything better to do - but doing that which is Spiritual is good

for the health and it is good for your body. How many people today are sick - mentally and physically because of the lack of anything to do.

I know some people that have plenty to do but they will not do it. They get busy here and there. And they have nothing to do but feel of their pulse and to look at their tongue - and give you a blow by blow description of how their nerves are acting. Now this has gone on for such a long long time that if some of them should wake up tomorrow morning feeling as strong as Joe Lewis - they would still pity themselves and wind up being invalids.

Taking care of your task will keep you out of the other fellow's business. You will not be meddling.

There would not be so many tragedies in life if men would not neglect their business and the task which God has given them.

V. (42) - Speaks about the judgement. It is going to come. This was portrayed in V. (36). The man who failed in his task of obedience was slain by a lion. That is, the King was going to be punished. That is, if a good neighbor would not carry out and smite his friend when directed to do so, how much more would the punishment of the wicked King be. Who spared his enemy and God when God said smite.

The case in which the prisoner was taken in battle and was committed to his custody - but he is missing.

V. (43) The King's (remorse.) He is displeased. This parable speaks to us. He went down to his house heavy and displeased.

How do you feel today, about the neglected tasks, the failure of taking advantage of the opportunities, which have been yours.