

CHRIST ... and His chapter of opportunities
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(LUKE 13)

There is a strange sequence of thought in the thirteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, for here three *lures are brought together to form what might be called a composite picture of the evangelical message. That each one of the three is complete in itself, none would deny; but investigation reveals that each one of the trio belongs to its companions. They are meant to contribute to each other, for united they present to mankind the most important message ever told.

Opportunities will not Last for Ever-vv. 6-9

The fig tree seemed a little out of place; many people surely wondered why it was ever allowed to stay. A fig tree in the middle of a vineyard seemed as incongruous as an elephant in a greenhouse! Yet for some inscrutable reason, the owner of the vineyard permitted it to stay. Surely he loved figs! Yet his liking for this fruit gave place to disappointment, and ultimately he said, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Then the dresser of the vineyard replied, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." The vineyard represented the world; the fig tree, the Jewish nation. That God loved the whole world was perfectly understandable, but why He should select the Jewish people to be His chosen race presented problems. A fig tree in the midst of a vineyard! During three years, the Lord sought fruit from the people He loved most; but alas, His expectations were not realized. When Christ said, "Let it alone this year," He obviously referred to the fourth year of His own ministry - the year in which He was to die. He was determined to make a final endeavor to influence Jewry, and their destiny would be settled by their reactions to His ministry.

Opportunities can Quickly Pass By-vv. 24-30

The golden sun was setting. Soon the gold would change to pink, and then to scarlet, and finally the ball of glory would sink beyond western horizons. The guardian of the gate stood ready to close the doors; people were hurrying; no camel driver wished to stay outside until sunrise. Beasts were urged to greater speed and the sun sank lower still. A short distance down the road two cameliers animatedly greeted each other. They were old friends', many months had passed since their last meeting. They talked of many things, and time slipped by. Soon a bugle sounded from the gate, and the great doors slowly swung into the closed position. Then the incoming traveller urged his camels to a trot, and approaching the gates cried for admittance. The imperturbable gateman calmly listened to the requests of the visitor and said, "I never knew you. Were you not standing along the road talking? You are well acquainted with our laws; you had an excellent opportunity to enter while the gates were open. Instead you wasted your time talking about things of little consequence. I never knew you." The city could be the Kingdom of God, for as the Lord Jesus described the scene, He said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Opportunities Lost Seldom Return-vv. 34, 35

The city seemed to be spread out as a cloth at His feet.

CHRIST ... and His chapter of opportunities
O place of memories; the city of God, so honored, so guilty,
so loved! And the Lord sighed and said, " O Jerusalem,
Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that
are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy
children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her
wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto
you desolate . . . " We are told that as He saw the city, He
wept over it, and described the horrors soon to turn it into
a place of unprecedented misery. He spoke of the destruction
of the temple, and of the inhuman savagery which would
destroy mothers and annihilate a generation even before its
birth. And when He saw these things looming in Israel's
immediate future, the vision broke His heart. His people
had been so near to salvation, but now they had missed it
for ever. Never again would that generation be visited by
the Son of God; never again would these people hear, " Come
unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will
give you rest." Israel's opportunity had gone, and even the
Lord Himself could not bring it back to them. "And Jesus
wept! "

Herein is wisdom. Here is a warning. Our proverb says,
A stitch in time saves nine." A decision in time saves
eternity!

Grace Abounding

" Mr. Powell, I'm in trouble." The speaker was a plump
little man, obviously agitated. I was surprised, for knowing
the man as I did, I had come to believe he was not lacking
in self-confidence. Though small of stature, he was capable
of ruling the world! " Yes, sir, I'm in great trouble. Will you
please try to help me?"

"What is wrong, Mr. -? "

" My wife has deceived me, sir. I have given her all my
wages for months and months, and instead of paying the
rent, she has squandered the money. Now the agent for the
landlords is turning us out. We have no other place, and
you are our only hope. Would you intercede for us and get that
man to change his mind?"

" Well, I'll see what I can do."

The office was small; the agent sat behind his desk. He
listened attentively as I stated the purpose of my visit. Mr.
and Mrs. - were very worried. They knew they had been
foolish, and wished the agent to give them another chance.
I told my tale to the best of my ability, and the agent
patiently listened. When I had finished, he quietly said, " Let
me show you something, Mr, Powell," and going to a shelf,
he reached for a large ledger. " I appreciate what you are
trying to do, sir; but now See how utterly unreliable and
worthless these people are." He found a certain page, and
placing his finger on a long row of figures, outlined what
had been happening for three years. He told of promises
repeatedly broken, and revealed how the husband was as
guilty as the woman he now blamed. "Mr. Powell," he
added, " I have been patient; I have gone out of my way
to try to help them; I have done all within my power, and
now my superiors are putting the squeeze on me. My job is
in jeopardy because I have been lenient with scoundrels." I
was speechless. This was the other side of the picture. " Mr.
Powell, can you give me any good reason why I should not
replace these people; why I should not turn them out?"
"No, I cannot. I did not know these facts. I am sorry I
bothered you." " Good, so you do see my point. All right;
there is no earthly reason why I should trust them once more,

CHRIST ... and His chapter of opportunities
but I'll do it for your sake. We'll see what happens this time."
Years have passed since that morning, but the people still
occupy the same house. The final act of grace was not in
vain. I recall the words of Luke 13: 7-9, " Behold, these three
years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none:
cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answer-
ing said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall
dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if
not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

The Miracle at Springhill

During October, 1958, the small coal-mining town of
Springhill, Nova Scotia, Canada, became a place of tragedy.
A " bump " wrecked the number two colliery and entombed
about one hundred men. The survivors declared they had
often experienced " bumps " when pressure built up in the
strata of the earth and "cracked." Yet this upheaval was
more like an earthquake. Within seconds the tunnels were
wrecked, and even the tram rails were hurled into the roof.
Feverishly the rescuers tunneled through debris in the hope
of finding survivors, but as day succeeded day hope was
more or less abandoned, and the gloom over the homesteads
deepened. The management regretfully announced there
could be no chance of men being found alive. Yet the miners
refused to give up hope; they said the opportunity of rescuing
their comrades would soon be gone; they would continue
working until the last possible moment. After a week of
unceasing toil the news thrilled the world that ten men had
been found alive. Television and radio programs were
changed to permit the entire country to watch and listen as
these men were brought to the surface. They had been
entombed without food, water and light for a week. The
management expressed gratitude to the brave rescuers, but
regretfully announced there could be no other survivors.
The miners toiled through the night. The following day they
found seven other men, and once again the nation rejoiced.
Alas, there were no other survivors. The tunnelling men
reached the other miners-too late. The old hymn says, " Be
in time," and in the rescue of immortal souls, this is the most
important truth ever uttered.

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