

**THE  
BON AIR  
PULPIT**

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**Scripture: Luke 19:34f**

**Sermon: Missing the Opportunity**

One of the most dramatic scenes in all of the Bible is located in the book of Luke 19. It is the story of what we call the triumphant entry of Jesus. It is the story that is often read on Palm Sunday. It is the time Jesus comes in to make His final appeal to His people and to present Himself as their Messiah. I wanted to read for you out of Luke 19 beginning at verse forty-one. *“As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said if you had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of the Lord’s coming to you.”*

In ancient times, there was a famous cartoon drawn to try to help us to understand the meaning of the word opportunity. It is of a man who is running to symbolize that opportunity usually comes and leaves us quickly. It has been said, as you know, opportunity knocks only once, but temptation bangs on the door all day long. When opportunity does come and it comes quickly, and in the famous cartoon, the man who is running is completely bald except there is a little tuft of hair just above his forehead. What the meaning of the cartoon is, is that if you don’t grab it as it comes by, there is nothing to grab as it passes you on. All of us have come to recognize in our life that we have had wonderful opportunities that we have let slip past us. We have reached out and caught only the back of the head. The word that is often used in our life is the word, *if only*. If only I had spent more time at home when the kids were small, if only I had visited mom and dad more before they died. If only I had enjoyed life more before health broke. If only I had studied more in college. If only, if only. All of us who are here today can look back on our life and realize the opportunities that we have let slip by.

Several years ago I had the privilege to go down to south Georgia to a church called Soberton Baptist Church to lead a revival service. After the morning Bible study, a man came up and he said, “Do you mind if I just drive you around and show you this part of Georgia?” We got in his truck and as we began to head out of the church parking lot he said, “Are you familiar with vidalia onions?” I said, “I am familiar with them and I have eaten a lot of them.” He said, “We are only about seven or eight miles from the little town of Vidalia and I would like to take you over and show you these onion fields and they are harvesting them now and this will give you a good opportunity to see a phenomena.” We drove over to Vidalia and he got out of the truck and he began to lead me up and down the rows where men were gathering the onions and they were taking

them to the packing places. He told me his first name but did not tell me his last name. I did not know what he did, but I began to suspect something when all of the supervisors began to come up to him and say, "Do you want a sack of onions. Would your friend like a sack of onions?" When I got back in the truck I said, "You never told me what you did." He said, "Well, I am the senator from this part of Georgia and I have been in the House of Representatives from Georgia the last thirty years and I just happen to be chairman of the Agriculture Committee." I said "Oh, okay." He said, "There is something else Vidalia is famous for. Have you ever heard of Paul Anderson?"

People my age have heard of Paul Anderson. Paul Anderson was an American Trailblazer, a weight lifter, but he grew up in the time when all of the weight lifting champions of the world were from Europe. All of the heavy weight lifting champions were from Russia. Paul Anderson went to Moscow for the competition and he became the world heavy weight champion in weight lifting. Well, his name was in all of the papers. His picture was on all of the televisions, he was interviewed everywhere. He became an instant celebrity. He said, "Paul Anderson lives in Vidalia, he has built a home for young boys who get in trouble. He is there to invest his life in them. I happen to be chairman of his board. Let us go by and see if Paul is in." We drove by and I had the wonderful privilege of meeting this famous American. I remembered all of that story and we recounted a part of it and I turned to him and I said, "But you know, I remember reading in one of Billy Graham's magazines one day, that you became a Christian after that Moscow experience." He said "Yes, I did." I said, "I remember you saying in that article that it was a bittersweet, experience for you because you realized that if you had been a Christian then, what an opportunity that would be for you." He said, "Yes, that is exactly right. I have often looked back on that and said what if I had been a Christian. What if that would have been the opportunity that I could have shared with young people that Christ made a difference in my life. I was on national television and if I could have said a word for Jesus." He said, "I look back on that," and I always remember these words, he said, "I look back on it and say, *if only.*"

All of us understand that one of the problems that we have in living is that we just begin to take so many things for granted and opportunities slip past us. We never have the privilege of being able to see what God had ordained for that day and that privilege and for that moment within our life.

I grew up as you know in south Louisiana and there was a little term they always used down there. It was called "lined up." What they meant by that was as soon as I get lined up, I am going to do that. I always recall that when I became a preacher I went out visiting a man who did this in our church. I said, "You have been visiting our church a long time. Are you ready to become a member of the church?" He said, "I am going to do that as soon as I get lined up." I said "How long have you lived in the community?" He said, "I haven't been here but eleven years." I began to think that is the problem with most of us. The problem is we keep waiting for some ideal moments, this great bolt of lightning, when everything gets lined up. Then we are going to seize the opportunity that is there. As you begin to live, you realize that water has just gone under the bridge and all kinds of things have happened and you have never seized the privileges that were yours. *If only.*

Hildegard has a story about that. He talked about the famous actor, Perrot. Perrot was on the stage giving a one-man performance and people were just enthralled with this man and his genius. One of the people waved to him and said, "Come here just a moment." He said, "We need you to make an announcement." He said, "The theater is on fire." Perrot went back to the front of the stage and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, do not panic but the place is on fire." He said, "we want all of you to get up." They thought it was part of the performance. They all clapped. He said, "No, the place is on fire. Please get up." The more animated he became, the more I realized what a genius this is. You would almost think this place is on fire. They all began to clap. Hildegard ended the story this way. I suppose this is the way the world will come to an end. To the universal clapping of hands, to people who take it as a joke.

So many of us have the situation in our life where God just presents opportunity after opportunity and we think it is a joke. I have a little saying that I keep in the office in the middle drawer of my desk where every day when I open my desk drawer this is what I read. *Some people live life as though it was a rehearsal and they will do it right next time.* How easy it is just to let life slip by and miss opportunity.

The story I read for you today is the story of missed opportunity. Jesus had plotted and planned this day. I think from the very beginning of His ministry. It was the time when He was going to come in openly, publicly, and say I am who you have been looking for. You remember so many times in Jesus life when He would say things and do things and say don't tell anybody. Be quiet about this. No being quiet today. I mean everybody is there and Jesus comes riding down the main street of town. While we didn't read all of the story, this is Passover time. At Passover time, Jewish people and believers from all over the world came to Jerusalem. It was estimated there were more people in Jerusalem at Passover time than anywhere else on the face of the earth at one time. He deliberately chose this day. He chose the day when they would be sacrificing their sheep for their own sins. You could see the smoke as it billowed up and people as they bowed their face before God. They look up and all of a sudden they hear all the shouting. They run out and these people are knowledgeable. They say what are we hearing? What they realize they are hearing is the great hallelujah. It is Psalms 126-134. It is what they sang on Passover. All of a sudden they realize everybody is excited. Zechariah 9:9 comes riding in to the middle of the town on a donkey. You recall the story. They went and started tearing down palm trees. That is from the book of Deuteronomy. That is to show God is the victory. They are all sitting there praising God. What an opportunity. Jesus has said now there is no more secret, no more night talk. No more saying, don't say. This is it. I am the Messiah. It all sounds so wonderful until you read what Jesus was doing on the donkey. He was crying. Jesus wept. He wept because He said "in spite of everything I have done, you are missing the opportunity. If you had only known who I was. If you only knew this was the day. Now you are going to let it slip through your fingers.

Let me ask you , what kind of opportunities does God have in front of you right now? You see, opportunity is when God works circumstance and puts you right in the middle of it and you realize there is really no way to get out, that you are going to have to face what God has placed there. You have heard, I am sure, that the Chinese character for

opportunity is the word crisis. You have been in crisis. You are here and it is crisis and trying to determine what you are going to do with this opportunity. I think every American ought to wake up every day in crisis. We are the most wealthy people on the face of the earth. I have people come to me on a regular basis and say why did God give us so much and so little to the rest of the world. They begin to say “we have an opportunity here.” We have an opportunity to spread the Gospel, we have the opportunity to send missionaries.

Every day is crisis day in America. What about the person who has just moved next door to you. You have met them and then you begin to realize, this isn't accidental. We have hit it off and what about this. One of the physicians in our church came to me after the first service. She said, “I just had a door to close and a door to open. I sat here all during the service saying, “God this is my opportunity.” Sometimes it is because of tragedy that happens in your life.

I shared the story with a family in our congregation so I have no hesitation in sharing it with you this morning. One of the families in our church had a tragic accident and lost one of their children. The other day I was doing my little male click thing. I saw them on television. They were there talking about how families can guard so that that won't happen to others. I contacted them and said “I want you to know I saw you on television. I wanted to tell you, you are good stewards of the sorrow that has come into your life.” He said to me “You just can't believe the opportunities that have opened to me as a father in grief.” You see, that happened and now I have got to seize it.

I think of the preacher's wife, Catherine Marshall. Her husband was a well known preacher, a pastor in DC at the Presbyterian Church. He became chaplain of the United States Senate in his early fifties. He woke his wife up in the middle of the night and said, “I feel pain in my chest.” They called 911. They took him to the hospital and Peter Marshall was dead the next morning. Mrs. Marshall came home, life crumbled all around her. “What am I going to do? How can I handle this?” She said, “I will tell his story. I will tell the story of a boy from Scotland, who was walking through the hills one night and fog was all around. All of a sudden in the middle of the night, he heard God speak to him and he stopped. When he stopped and prayed, the fog lifted and he realized that he was at a cliff. If he had taken one more step, he would have died. How God had led him to this country and put him as one of the most famous ministers in America.” She took that opportunity and told the story. A movie was made about him, a best selling book was written about him and she began to write down all of his sermons. They became best sellers around the world. She said, “This is my opportunity.”

You are going to have an opportunity at the close of this service. I think this is an unique time for Bon Air Church. Five years ago, one of the men of our church was appointed as chairman of a committee to determine what the long range facility needs of this church was. That was five years ago. Five years of planning, five years of praying, five years of giving, five years of drawing, five years of building and in two months you are going to walk into it. At the close of the service you are going to have the opportunity to vote on a young man who is going to come to help us to utilize that facility well. The question then that we all need to ask ourselves is with all of this investment, and all of this time and all of these opportunities, this is a critical moment. A man is

running through and the hair is at the tuft of his head, you had better seize it now, you won't have an opportunity later. Jesus knew the *if only's*. Jesus knew that is one of the great problems of us all. He looked at these people at this junction of history and He started crying. I want you to hear what He said. It is not enough to say I missed the opportunity, if you don't know that sometimes there are dire consequences because you are not stabbed awake in your spirit. Listen to what Jesus said. *"Because you missed the day of opportunity, your enemies are going to encamp around you, they are going to dash the city, your women and your children, they will not leave a stone on top of a stone."*

Let me tell you how that happened. Jesus died 33 or 34 A.D somewhere in that time frame. The year 69 A.D. thirty-six or thirty-seven years later, one of the most famous generals in the world, Titus showed up near Jerusalem with a tent Roman Legion. People hearing that the Romans had invaded their country, all fled to Jerusalem because that is where the wall was. Inside the city of Jerusalem were one million people. They thought, they looked outside, the tent legion was there. They all said he will attack tomorrow, he will attack next week. He didn't attack next week or next month. He waited for one year. When the people had literally either starved to death or they were so weak they couldn't fight, he then blew the bugle and said, "Now tent legion, attack." From all around the city, those roman soldiers hit that wall with their ladders. They were up over it and they said what they found inside was one of the great massacres of history. He said, "Not enough." If anybody is left alive, kill everyone." Not enough. He went to Herod's temple that took forty-six years to build. Some of those stones on there weighed two and one half tons. They don't know how in the world they put them on top of each other. He said, "Tear it down." Every stone was taken down, every stone was put on the ground. Titus said, "Not enough. Go out in the hills and find plows. Come back and plow Jerusalem under ground. Not enough. Go down to the Dead Sea. Get salt and come back and strew it. May Jerusalem never be again."

You see in Jesus mind, this is what was going on. He wasn't hearing the praise God. He wasn't hearing the Hallelujah's. He wasn't hearing "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord." I will tell you what He saw. He saw the Roman soldiers scaling the walls and coming over because these people did not know that this was the day of the Lord's visitation. They missed it. I know, thank God there is forgiveness when we sin. Thank God, God gives other chances. I want to tell you sometimes, sometimes, there is no other chance. If you miss those kids now, they are not going to be children anymore. If you miss using your health now, that is going to be gone one day. Jesus understood, you better seize it now. It may not come back again.

Some of you in this room, God has been working in your life and He has been putting all kinds of things together for you. If you have never committed your life to Christ, what you are going to do when you do commit your life to Him, is you are going to look back and realize how many times you met God face to face and you didn't know it. God has been doing stuff in your life to bring you to Him and maybe you haven't realized it yet. This morning you do. A crisis opportunity is here again.