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John 12:35-43

“MAKING THE MOST OF GOD-GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES”

Intro:

If God dropped an opportunity in your lap, would you know what to do with it?

I have to ask myself that question, particularly after reading the events that I have just read from the story of Jesus. Here were some people that had the biggest God-given opportunity that there ever was, and they blew it! That's right. The very son of God was visiting them to offer the opportunity of a lifetime and they didn't take it. The light of the ages was shining right in their front yard, and they wouldn't walk in it. The greatest miracles ever done were being displayed all around them as proof that Jesus was the son of God... and yet they refused to recognize Jesus as the king God had promised and they refused to follow Him. Instead, they completely rejected Him. Man, they had the greatest opportunity God has ever given, dropped right into their laps, and they fumbled it!

So I ask: If God dropped an opportunity in your lap, would you know what to do with it? For, you see, I believe God wants to do just that. Every time we study his word and his promises together, he is giving us an opportunity.

For some of us, God gives the opportunity to straighten up our lives... to get off the treadmill and start going someplace.

For other, God gives us an opportunity to do something great with our lives – to find a purpose, His master plan for our lives. I found my purpose one day as I heard a man explain God's Word. It was a God-given opportunity I could not pass up.

For others, the hearing of God's Word gives an opportunity to be free – yes, he is offering to set us free from the slavery of fear or of doubt or of our lusts or of some habit that is destroying our effectiveness. I declare: God can and will set you free. He's giving you an opportunity right now to respond.

For some, this will be the opportunity to gain everlasting life. Jesus offers it to anyone who will put his trust in Him.

God is continually offering every one of us here today some golden God-given opportunity. Will we do something with it, or will we blow it, like the people in the story?

Why don't we learn how to not blow it, by noticing what these people did wrong? Then let's see how we can do it better. If we want to make the most of our God-given opportunities, there are three positive things we must do.

I. **USE IT OR LOSE IT** vs. 35-36

It is a fact of life that what we don't use, we lose. This is especially true of our God-given opportunities. God had given these people more light to go by than any generation that had ever lived. God sent his son to them to light up the place with the truth about everything. They had that light and refused to use it. So God took it away. They would never have it again. VS 36 says that Jesus "did hide Himself from them." This was the end of His public ministry. They had refused to use the light he gave, so he would turn the light off.

What a principle for life: Use it or Lose it!

You have a strong body? Use it or Lose it! Exercise it or grow soft and weak.

You have an opportunity to get an education? Use it or Lose it! Put it off to buy a car or get married or have some fun, and you'll never have the opportunity later.

We have the opportunity to protect our freedom and to vote for our representatives in government. If we don't use that opportunity, we will lose it by default.

You may have an opportunity to break into something with more possibilities and a greater future potential. Use it or lose it. Go for it now or someone else will grab it and run with it.

The principle works in every area of life, but nowhere as decidedly as in spiritual matters. You see, God is forever giving us light on spiritual matters. He shows us some light on something in our lives that could be improved. Maybe he uses the reading or preaching of his word like a spotlight to show us some area of need in our lives. He is giving us an opportunity to deal with a problem before it hurts us. If we use the light he gives us and walk in it, we are better for it. If we refuse the light, we will lose it. "My spirit will not always strive with a man, saith the Lord." God will turn off the light. He will stop pointing out these things and let us find out the hard way.

God may be shining a light on your heart today. He may be saying that your pride or your bitterness or your unforgiving spirit or your resentment or your jealousy or your over-active temper is going to get the best of you. He's making it clear. Use that light, my friend! Do something about what you've seen. Or you'll lose concern, and that thing in your life will eat at you until you will never be all God hoped you could be.

We can continue to go to church and hear sermons, but our ears will grow dull of hearing and our spiritual eyes will grow too dim to have any spiritual insight.

Maybe you remember the first time God gave you light enough to see that you needed to be saved. It really grabbed you. The invitation was given and you wanted to go forward for help. God's spirit was giving you an opportunity. And today, the invitation is given and you can just stand there and not even be stirred. You didn't use God's light and you lost you. While you have the light walk in it.

Use it or lose it. That's the first rule in making the most of a God-given opportunity.

II. **KEEP A CLOSE CHECK ON YOUR HEART** vs. 37-41

God gave these people in Jesus' day the opportunity of seeing the greatest miracles ever performed in order to help them believe and follow their promised Messiah. He fed 5,000 people with a boy's lunch. There were people all over the place that used to be blind beggars, and now they were useful members of society. Former invalids followed Jesus around like an army of faith. And now, to top all, Lazarus was brought back after being dead for four days. He had come to Jerusalem with Jesus and was quite a spectacular attraction of interest (vs. 9). And yet, with all these signs and wonders, many still wouldn't believe.

Why not? They didn't want to believe! Their eyes saw and it registered in their minds, but their hearts didn't want to believe. If they had believed in Jesus, they would have had to follow and obey Him. And that would have meant stopping some things they loved to do and letting go of some things that their hearts desired. So their hard hearts would not allow them to believe, even in the face of many miracles.

Our hearts influence everything we believe and do. We need to keep a check on them. "out of the heart are the issues of life." Prov. 23:7 says "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

God can lay an opportunity of a lifetime in our laps, but if our hearts are not right, we will fumble it and blow it just as badly as the men who rejected the Son of God!

Our hearts can grow hard – hard toward God. That's what the quote Isaiah's day refused to listen to anything he said and they refused to believe the message that he delivered to them from God. Why? Because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

Now that's confusing, isn't it? If God hardened their hearts, why did he get disappointed in them for doing it? At face value, it looks like this is the worst Old Testament Scripture he could have quoted. And yet, it is quoted in this connection six different times in the New Testament.

What it means is this: God has built certain laws into our human natures. One of them is that, when we harden our hearts often enough, the day will come when they will remain hardened. It's a God-given law. It's as if God hardened them himself.

Now he really didn't and he really wouldn't. but when we do it ourselves long enough, God's laws of human nature make sure it continues. So don't keep hardening your heart. Some day you won't be able to stop!

The most famous example of this law of nature is Pharaoh, the Egyptian dictator who didn't want to obey God and let God's people go from being his slaves. (Exodus 7/8) It says four

times that “God hardened Pharoah’s heart.” But this only came AFTER “Pharoah hardened his own heart” the first 6 times.

If we continually harden our hearts against Gdo, the day will come when we can do nothing else (Hebrews 3:7-11). So keep a close check on your heart!

Once a Sunday school teacher was teaching five year olds to keep their hearts tender toward God. “Every time we say ‘No’ to Jesus, your heart gets a little harder. And if you keep saying ‘No’ the heart gets harder and harder until God calls it a heart of stone, and you no longer even care about the things of God.”

Now you never know how much these little ones take in. but one dear little girl was there, her eyes fastened on the teacher, but her mind was on her daddy, who never went to Sunday school or church and never seemed to care about the Word of God. He just sat at home each Sunday and read the newspaper.

When she got home, she darted up into her father’s arms and said “Daddy, daddy, feel your heart! Is it getting like a stone?” “What are you talking about?” he said, “Well, the man at Sunday school said if you say ‘no’ to Jesus long enough, you are going to get a stone where your heart should be, have you got a stone there? Oh I hope you haven’t daddy, for if you have you can’t be saved.” And, with that, she burst into tears.

Out of the mouths of babies! That child like explanation got to the father. That very day he checked his heart and discovered that he had just been too selfish and preoccupied with other things to pay any attention to the promptings of Jesus. That day he got on his knees and yielded his life to Christ.

Oh, check your heart, my friend. It will affect your outlook on everything. If you allow it to harden, you will miss God’s most obvious and wonderful opportunities.

Want to make the most of God-given opportunities? Use it or lose it, keep a close check on your heart, and thirdly:

III. **THINK FOR YOURSELF** vs. 42-43

What sad words! Here a lot of the religious leaders did believe Jesus, but they still refused the opportunity he gave them because they were afraid of what other people might think. Like “Chamelionmen,” they blended in with whatever environment they were in. “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” they were letting other people do their thinking for them to the point that they blew their opportunity with God!

Think for yourself! That’s the message in these verses. Why allow peer pressure and social acceptance and desire to be “one of the boys” make you lose out on God’s glorious opportunities.

If the truth were known, there are probably a lot of us here today that already have plenty of light to know what God wants us to do, and our hearts are still and tender. We really want to do what God says. But we are afraid of what someone else may think. Or we are afraid it may

affect our social standing or our business status. Believe me, the pressure is real, and it's not just the young that feel it.

Well are you going to let everyone else do your thinking for you? If they all want to stick their heads in a lions mouth will you join? Or when it comes right down to it is popularity with men as important as pleasing God? Think for yourself.

Long years ago, there was a war that took place between two Indian Rajahs. The one defeated the other and took captive the son of the rival.

On the day he was to return to his own palace, he prepared to march into the city in triumph. There was a great procession of elephants. Among them was the young prince. He was told that he was to walk bare-footed and bare-headed. Indignantly, the proud young prince said, "What! Go like that! What will people think? What kind of faces will they make?" The Rajah said, "You haven't heard it all yet. You shall carry a bowl of milk in your hands; and, if you so much as spill a single drop, you will lose your head."

In a few moments, they had brought the bowl of milk, and two guards walked with him, one on either side, as the procession began to move. And that young prince walked along, carefully holding his bowl of milk for about a mile, until he finally reached the Rajah without spilling a drop.

"Well, sir prince" said the Rajah, "what kind of faces did the people make?"

The prince looked up and said, "Your majesty, I did not see the faces of the people. I only saw my life, which I held in my own hands, and I knew that one false step would make me lose it."

Dear friend, one false step can cost us so much. One God-given opportunity lost can affect our entire lives. So forget what the crowd thinks. Think for yourself, and do what you know deep down is the best.

Perhaps there is someone here today who has light enough to realize that God is offering you a place in his family. Your heart is still tender. But you are afraid of what other will think. Don't worry what they think. You have your destiny in your own hands. Do what you know is right!