

Urgent Patience – Acts 1:1-11

Have you ever known a married couple who were opposites or were very different from each other? She was 6'2," and he was barely 5' tall. He was extremely handsome while she was as plain as a wooden post. She loved her Bible, while he preferred his hand guns. Perhaps you've known people who had other very different personalities. He was outgoing and friendly, but she was painfully shy. Or she was an optimist, while he was a constant pessimist. Have you known couples like these who, despite the differences between them, made their marriages work well? They had learned to make their diversities complimentary not adversarial. *"Jack Sprat could eat no fat, His wife could eat no lean; And so betwixt them both, They lick'd the platter clean."*

This evening I'd like to bring together two very different words – two different approaches to life. They aren't exactly contradictory, and what I hope to show is that we shouldn't develop one to the neglect of the other. But usually, if we consider either one, it would not be in the light of the other. I'd like to tie together *"urgency"* and *"patience."* Hopefully you'll be able to think of ways they might be complimentary – supplying strength to one another. But before we get to that point, we need to consider them separately.

We have started with a missions text which could be developed into a satisfactory New Year's message. *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."* *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* The evangelistic theme is obvious enough that I shouldn't need to highlight it – *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

But what does **Acts 1** say about the year 2020? One of its messages is – *"Don't waste your time on sophomoric future forecastings."* Don't waste your time pretending super wisdom and proving yourself fool by prophesying the future – *"I predict this; I predict that."* No, *"it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."*

This scripture also says, *"Limit your anxiety about the future to the extent of your actual knowledge of the future."* If a snarling, growling dog has his fangs pointed in your direction, you have cause to be concerned, but we don't have time to imagine Pit Bull Terriers and Rottweilers around every bush. Solomon condemned the slothful man who says, *"There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the street."* If there really is a lion in the streets, you'd be wise to stay home, but they are really quite rare.

Something else our scripture says is that the best way to cope with the unknown is to dwell on the known. And for the Christian – for the believer – we know the Lord – the omnipotent, omniscient God. I have a little set of books by C.H. Spurgeon, one of which is called *"Twelve New Year Sermons."* One chapter, right in the middle of the book, is entitled, *"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and forever."* That is certainly one thing that we can really know for sure – He is right in the middle of everything. He holds the future as securely as He has held the past. And the Lord has promised to go with us into this next year – and far beyond. *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."* Someone has said, *"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a well-known God."*

And another thing we are told here is to fill our hands with the work of Christ. Hats off to the past, but coats off to the future. And this brings us back to the missionary theme of this scripture. *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

But my theme is a corollary to all this. After the Lord Jesus had spoken to His disciples one last time, He ascended into Heaven. *"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

Consider the subject of Christian urgency.

Those two unusual men in white apparel who seemed to appear out of nowhere... Those ambassadors of God had a divine commission to mildly rebuke the disciples for standing around, when there was obedience to be performed – when there was work to be done. Some people might commend the disciples for their diligence in trying to understand the doctrine of Christ's ascension. Some saints would pat themselves on the back for being sufficiently spiritual to meditate on the risen Lord. But those angels essentially told the disciples they were wasting time. How long was it before they interrupted the disciples' meditation? An hour? A minute? They didn't even have ten

minutes to spare; there was urgent work to be done. *“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?”* Before coming back to this scripture, let’s consider **Romans 13**. This is a rather dark scripture, but its message is quite positive. I say that it is dark because it reminds us that we are currently living in darkness compared to what we shall enjoy in eternity. This is so contrary to what most poets try to tell us – we are now in the light and the future is dark. Actually, we are now in the dark, but soon we shall bask in the light of Christ’s presence. **Revelation 22:5** – *“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”*

Romans 13:11 – *“Knowing the time (brethren), that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”* I am convinced that Paul believed in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that he believed in the pre-tribulational return of Christ for his saints. And as far as he was concerned it wasn’t down the road a few generations – it was imminent – soon. Since *“our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed on Christ, it is now high time to awake out of sleep.”* *“It is high time.”* Isn’t that an interesting phrase – an interesting translation? It literally means, *“The time is now”* – *“the hour is come.”* *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light”* and get to work.

In the context of **chapter 13**, Paul generalizes some of the principles of Christian living. You could say that he gives us more *“New Year Resolutions”* to consider. *“Let us walk honestly, as in the day.... put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.”* There is no more important day than today to appear in the garments of Christ and to behave like a disciple of the Lord. Christian children sometimes think there is nothing they can do to serve their Saviour. They can’t preach or teach a Sunday School class. Their voices are developed enough to sing the praises of the Lord before the congregation. They don’t know enough to remove the doubts that others might have about salvation. And as a result they wait until they are better equipped. But **Romans 13:11** applies to babes in Christ as much as it does to the elderly and middle aged. *“Knowing the time (brethren), that now it is high time to awake out of (our excuses); for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”*

I read a statement by Spurgeon the other day in which he said that he was saved when he was 17, but he wished it had been much, much earlier, because he wasted more than a decade of his life. From the age of 7 to 10 he might have learned much about Christ, and he might have matured in Him. Then he went on to quote another man who said he was saved at the age of 20, but he wished he had been born again 21 years earlier. Paul probably wasn’t thinking about children as he wrote his **Roman epistle**; he was thinking about mature and semi-mature adults. *“Knowing the time (brethren), that now it is high time to awake out of (our sleep; our excuses; our lethargy); for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”*

Not only is there an urgency to get dressed and get out into the fight, there is even a greater urgency to clean up our lives so that we might be fit to fight. **Verse 9** – *“For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*

I know a former Baptist preacher living down in central Idaho – a man a bit younger than myself – who appears to think he’s done enough during his life to serve the Lord. He has cast aside the greatest service anyone can do for the Lord – pastor one of the Lord’s churches and to preach the gospel of Christ. He is at the forefront of an army of retired Christians who think they have done enough. They have taught their Bible classes, they raised their children; and they tithed on their incomes for years. They had their noses bloodied visiting door-to-door; they had their toes stomped while standing on people’s porches. And now they have retired to contemplate the beauties of the Saviour while gazing up into Heaven.

Last week there was a smoke detector in my house which started chirping – on and off; on and off – periodically. I figured out that it was one of five, but it wasn’t beeping often enough for me to determine exactly which one it was, and I had only two batteries. It took me two days to finally figure it out. Then 24 hours later another started playing

the same aggravating game. Batteries wear out. The package says they are 8 year batteries, but not when they are sitting idly in a smoke detector.

Going back to **Acts 1**, those two men in white apparel told the disciples to stop wasting time and get to work. But that was after Jesus had said, *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”* Perhaps those angels remind us all that we cannot store the power of God indefinitely. The Lord will be happy to replenish our power supply if we are using it for His glory, but if we are sitting on it, it will evaporate. There is work to be done. *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”* *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

Okay there is a work to be done, but what about the urgency?

Take note of what the angels said, *“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”* On what day will the Lord return? *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”* But He **IS** coming again, and when He does all opportunities to serve Him as Christians have done for two thousand years will be over. That will be a good thing; it will be a blessed thing. **But** if for 50 years, we have neglected our opportunities, that moment of demarcation will not be such a blessing. It will be a shameful thing to look back to see how much of our lives we have wasted in worldly or fleshly pursuits. That Christ is coming again creates urgency, because He is coming imminently.

And then there is the fact, not often recognized by young people, but life is short. When people get to be my age, it's like turning around and all of a sudden we realize 70 years have passed. I have outlived both my parents by about 15 years. How many more years will there be, even if the Lord doesn't return soon? None of us can know. Not only is life short, but the longer my time-line grows, the more I realize my physical weaknesses. More and more often, I have to have a cup of coffee in the afternoon to keep me sharp in my study. I used to have my computer monitor at the back of my desk, but this week I moved it 6 inches closer. My eyes are going, my wife says my hearing is going, my stamina and strength are not the same. If I don't employ these things now, I may not be able to. Not only is the Lord coming soon, but it seems like my own departure is getting nearer. There is urgency in these things.

But it's not just **my** departure, this urgency involves the departure of the unsaved as well. In the midst of Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth he reaches out to the lost in that congregation. *“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)”*

That verse in **II Corinthians 6:2** is often tied to **Hebrews 3 and 4**. **II Corinthians 6:2** says, *“For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, **NOW** is the accepted time; behold, **NOW** is the day of salvation.”* That is a verse often preached to the lost – don't delay trusting Christ – you may not have tomorrow. **Hebrews 4:7** can be applied in that same context – *“Again, (God) limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”* Paul links *“hard hearts”* and *“today”* earlier in **Hebrews 3**. **Verse 8** – *“Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:”* And **verse 5** – *“While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.”* I bring these to your attention because I'm not sure we have any right to apply the third chapter to a gospel presentation. It begins with *“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and Hight priest of our profession Jesus Christ.”* **Hebrew 3** expresses the urgency of the hour for the child of God. In the midst of the urgent need to trust Christ as Lord and Saviour, we have the same language used to urge the saints to serve the Lord.

But now let me move to the subject of patience.

God is not over-awed by the shortness of our lives; Jehovah isn't bound by time at all. There are no clocks or calendars in God's throne room. While we may look on some of our responsibilities with a sense of urgency, the Lord is not so moved. He isn't dependent upon our strength or our service to get His work accomplished.

So the two men in white apparel didn't tell the disciples to get out of Jerusalem into Judea and then head to Samaria to preach the gospel. They merely brought the heads of the disciples out of the clouds and back to the Lord's

instructions. And the first of those responsibilities was to await for the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not yet equipped to do the work of the Lord; they had to wait several days first. Some of them may have been pulling at the traces to get to work, but it would have been outside the Lord's will at that point. Patience brother, patience. Bro. Fulton and I have been talking about this sort of thing. Let's say that one of the young men we have had visit out here the past year felt called of the Lord to work on the Spokane reservation – Tobias Hart; Hunter Buffin; Jackson Lawley. If that man moved to Davenport or Reardon and began to drive out to the reservation every day, either he or his wife would burn out by the second winter – because of the isolation and the difficulty of the work. From our fleshly perspective, it appears that he should move to Post Falls or Spokane, and work here with us, growing in the Lord while slowly building contacts and making friends on the reservation. It is highly unlikely there will be an instantaneous work among the Spokanes – patience will be essential. But that doesn't mean we wouldn't love to see one or to men move here tomorrow – there is a need.

Despite the urgency of the work, if Christians don't wait for the Lord's will and the Lord's power, they will end up working in the strength of the flesh. There is not a young man, called to preach, who is ready to pastor a church a year after his call. Even Paul had to spend time in the desert with Christ before he started to fulfill his commission. And the church in Jerusalem had to wait several days before being filled with divine power. It is easy – it is tempting – to run ahead of the Lord's will, talking all the while about the urgency of the hour.

How did the disciples, the church, spend the time between the ascension and Pentecost? *“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”* The urgency of our commission must be balanced with our dependence on the Lord – and that involves our need of prayer. Perhaps, this is where we need to learn to *“pray without ceasing.”* The urgency of the need should compel us to be about our master's business. But while carrying out our immediate responsibilities, we ought to be in prayer. I didn't need to stop and spend half an hour asking the Lord whether or not I should preach tonight. I prayed about this evening service, but most of it was while I was studying and preparing. I prayed as I went along.

One of the problems of the ministry – anyone's ministry – the missionary's, yours or mine... One of the dangers of the ministry – is how personal it becomes. There is a natural tendency for the pastor to speak about *“his church”* – *“his ministry”* or *“his sermon.”* The missionary may come by and talk about *“his burden.”* I suppose that is natural, but when it gets out of control, the servant of God can think of himself as more important than God, and this means disaster.

This is what I mean by *“urgent patience”* or *“patient urgency.”* The year 2020 may not seamlessly blend into 2021; this may be our last year to serve the Lord in this way. That creates an urgency – every Christian ought to feel it. But in running off to do the work of the Lord, there must be a surrender to His will. We need to prayerfully wait for His leadership or, without a doubt, the faster we go, the more slowly things will be accomplished.

There are exciting things taking place around here. In several ways we are a different church than we were 12 or 18 months ago. And we may be quite a bit different again 12 months from now. But I have to tell myself to slow down sufficiently to let the Lord work. There is an urgency, but there is also an equally important need for patience. It is the Lord's work and if we make ourselves available, we can be the tools the Lord will use in this work.