
Now is the Day of Salvation! (2 Corinthians 6:1-13)
10/21/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Do you remember the projects in school? The teacher would give you a month or two to work on a research paper or a science fair presentation, and like good little boys and girls we all started off to work on the project immediately, devoting at least half an hour every day to the project until we had it all done and handed in about a week early, right?

Not sure about you, but for me, those projects usually went more like this: completely ignore that there even was any assignment until the night before it was due then I stayed up till sunrise completing the project with all the excellence that sleep deprivation and a sickly amount of carbonated caffeine could muster.

For many of us, it's easy to put off important things when they aren't immediately in front of us. And it's not just school projects. Sometimes, it's that really important thing that we need to say to someone we love. Sometimes, it's doing that thing we promised ourselves a million times that we would get done. Today, God warns us against procrastinating, but he's not talking about school projects, conversations, or to-do lists. He's talking about repentance. He's talking about our relationship with him. Today, God, through the Apostle Paul, calls us to produce the fruits of repentance because Now is the Day of Salvation!

In our other two readings today, we saw political and spiritual leaders of God's people who were putting off their repentance. They did not give God that fruit which he desired. And eventually, incredibly patient as our God is, his patience with them ran out. A time came when everyone knew that they deserved judgment.

In our epistle lesson, we read the words of the Apostle Paul. Through his books in the New Testament, Paul is one of our spiritual leaders. As an Apostle, bringing the words of Jesus to us, Paul calls us to learn from the mistakes of those unrepentant leaders. Do not put off your repentance. Paul urges us not to receive God's grace in vain. Now is the time of God's favor! Now is the Day of Salvation!

But how *do* we receive God's grace in vain? We believe that we are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone! We believe that God has accomplished everything for our salvation! We believe that our salvation is sure and

certain in Christ! We know that our works don't save us. God tells us that we cannot save ourselves and so we trust completely and only in him for salvation. So then, how can we possibly receive God's undeserved love for us sinners in vain, emptily, for no purpose?

Well, by closing the book. Paul had traveled to Corinth and told people there about Jesus. He had given them the very words of God. Later, when Paul left to continue his mission work in other places, some false teachers had come and claimed that Paul was not a real Apostle. They claimed he did not have the true Word of God. They were trying to get people to doubt *what* Paul said. They were trying to get people to ignore *what* Paul said.

And the false teachers were getting their way. The Corinthians were beginning to lose their focus on the Words of Christ which they heard from Paul's mouth. They were listening to the more entertaining and dynamic speakers; they were listening instead to the latest trends and ideas; they were listening to these false teachers; all instead of listening to Paul, the man who actually spoke God's True Word.

Friends, the false teachers haven't gone away. We live in a world of advertising, of the rat race, of keeping up with the Joneses, there's a billion things to watch on TV and the internet, everyone is vying for our attention and they have the tools to keep us hooked. There's always something to keep our attention, and all of them give us another reason to ignore *what* the Bible says, to doubt *what* the Bible says, to put off our repentance.

This is what it means to receive God's grace in vain. It means to close your Bible and toss it aside. It means to hear that God gave everything to make you his own and then ignore him. It means to know that you have the very Words of God in your Bible and to never open it up. It means to know you have God himself nourishing your soul through Word and Sacrament when you come to church and then to just let your mind wander for the whole service or frankly to just not go.

Now is the time of God's favor! Now is the Day of Salvation! Don't put off the Scriptures until later! There might not be a later! How many people always meant to get into God's Word more but finally died without every getting to it! Don't put repentance on your to-do list and then forget about! This isn't just some school

project. It's the very Words of God written down for you and me to understand, to know, and to put into practice.

God tells us that his Word is our very life! I know life gets busy. I know it can be hard to fit God's Word in, I know you can feel too tired to focus on the sermon, I know you have other godly duties to be doing. But are all those other things really more important than listening to God speak to you?

There once was a man trying to chop a tree down. After hacking away at it all morning, his neighbor came to him and said, "That axe is almost as blunt as a club. You could chop that tree down a lot quicker if you sharpened it." But the man said, "Nah, sharpening the axe would take too much time." So he spent the rest of the day hitting that tree with a blunt axe.

God gave us his Word so that we might have real life. Is it really worth our time to do life our way instead of listening to God and his ways? Is it really worth our time to spend our whole lives smacking that tree with a blunt axe?

Look at what you have here! You have the Words of God, written down by people like Paul. Paul describes his life here, not to show us an example of how we should be living, but to show us that his Words genuinely are God's Words to us. God made sure that Paul, as an Apostle, lived the gospel and didn't just preach it because he wants you and me to be saved through that gospel message!

Paul preached Jesus Christ who walked the path to the cross and by his resurrection bought forgiveness, life, and salvation for the whole world. And so Paul made every effort to make sure every part of his life commended that message.

Paul's gospel proclaims that heaven is our home, not here. So Paul's priority was growing the Word and going with that Word. That remained Paul's priority even when those goals lead him to beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, lack of sleep and food. This isn't our home, and those things aren't more important than our eternal home.

Paul's gospel proclaims undeserved forgiveness from God that leads us to real repentance, and so God gave Paul certain fruits of the Spirit so that his life demonstrated that genuine repentance and love for his neighbor so that no one

would be put off of Paul's message because of his sins.

Paul's gospel proclaims that we are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, and so Paul's life showed God's power in the midst of his own weakness. Outwardly, Paul often looked like a dying man, like a beaten man, but he lived on, God sustained him through those trials and gave him real life in Christ. Paul looked like a sorrowful man, and yet through the hope of heaven that Christ had given him, Paul always rejoiced. That is, in spite of everything falling apart in Paul's life, he was always relieved to know that he could trust what God had promised him. Paul looked like a poor man, and yet by sharing the gospel he was giving the eternal treasures of heaven to countless people. Paul looked like someone with absolutely nothing going for him, and yet God had promised him everything in Christ.

That sounds like someone worth our time. Don't let Paul's words get lost in the shuffle, because he is sharing the very words of God with you, words about hope in spite of this sin-stained life. Don't let God's Word become something you'll get to eventually. Now is the Day of Salvation! Hear the Word now. Find ways to get God's Word into your life more, to be thinking about it more, to be practicing it more.

Don't just shut your Bible and toss it aside. Instead, dig into it and see how your God died to save you from your sins. Read it and hear how God graciously purchased you from slavery to Satan, and he didn't purchase you with gold or silver, earthly wealth that is here today and gone tomorrow. No, God purchased you with his own precious blood, worth more than all the treasures the earth contains. Study your Bible with your fellow Christians and see how your God has saved you from this life of pain, toil, hardships, and disappointment, and instead God has graciously opened heaven to you. There, we will finally experience life as it was meant to be. There will be no sadness or death. There, we will find true fulfillment. There, we will know what real relationships are like with each other and especially with our God who loves us and gave himself for us.

My fellow followers of Christ, know who your spiritual leaders are. Follow people like Paul, who truly did speak God's Word. Dig into that Word. Grow in it. Go with it. And never put off your repentance until later. Because Now is the Day of Salvation! Amen.