

1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Jonah 3:1,5-10; Mark 1:14-20

1/25/15

Church Year and Other Readings:

Sunday of Church Year: Epiphany 3

Old Testament Reading: Jonah 3:1-5,10

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

Context:

Within Book: Not so much the context in book, but in this chapter. Paul is talking about whether it is wise to marry or not and presents arguments on both sides. He addresses a key principle behind all of the guidelines he is giving.

Message of context: Even in things that are most important and demanding in life, we are never to get so wrapped up in them as to forget that which is eternal.

Importance

Passage

---- Brothers, I say this  
----- the remaining time is short  
-----let those having wives  
-----be as those not having them  
----- let those who weep  
----- be as those not weeping  
----- let those who rejoice  
----- be as those not rejoicing  
----- let those doing business  
----- be as those not doing business  
----- let those using the world  
----- be as those not using the world  
----- For this world's scheme  
-----is passing away

MAIN THOUGHT OF THE TEXT:

Balance your life so that what is important has a priority place

TELL THE STORY! (What are the main points of the text.)

- 1) Our time on earth is short
- 2) Don't be engrossed in this world's things
- 3) All these things will pass away

APPLY THE STORY (convict, console, encourage, instruct, guide, direct)

- 1) Find comfort in that which endures
- 2) Getting wrapped up in the things of this world will finally lead to either disappointment (when you realize that these things cannot be and are not the goal) or else complete ruin (in that you think these really are the end and goal)
- 3) A lesser (yet important) point is to not let marriage, weeping, mourning, worldly business and the like be disparaged. They are good and God-pleasing. The main problem is that we never seem to strike the balance of moderation. We either want to get engrossed in them or spurn them.
- 4) From what follows, it becomes evident that the point is devotion to God's will.

Craddock's organizational principle for a sermon: (for examples, see Preaching, p.157)

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Theme: We put worldly things in their proper place

Subject: Spiritual priorities

Title: Are you ready for the new Operating System?

### First Things First

#### Putting First Things First

- I. Because the time is short
  - A. There will be an end by which certain things need to be done
  - B. What is the "short time"
    1. The time until Jesus comes
    2. this world will end, but that time is not the end
      - a. if it were, none of this would be an issue
  - C. We can hear the clock ticking (like in my office) if we pay attention
    1. The older we get, the louder the clock ticks
      - a. that is a blessing
      - b. radio personality at age 63 recently said he had first bout with feeling his age. "Not all my dreams are going to come true"
    2. But we can hear it when young too.
      - a. we have all had young people die when we were young
      - b. We can never do all the things we would like to do
      - c. we commit to things we cannot do
      - d. saying good-bye does that too
    3. It is a reminder of something more important
  - D. Focus
    1. So we do with many things in our life
      - a. we have many plans
      - b. but as we go, we pare these down to what is essential

2. Forced to focus, we figure out what is important
3. That is part of why older people get more serious about life
  - a. “Those aren’t the same parents I had. These are old people trying to get into heaven”
  - b. truth is that we become aware of these things at older age.
- E. What will you do in the new economy, with the new operating system?

II. Not Distracted By Earthly Things (not highlighting so much staying in God’s Word – last week – as filtering out the confusing things)

- A. “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult”
- B. We must keep our mind on heavenly things
  1. Worldly things
    - a. Jesus’ warning to the rich young man is applicable to us
      - i. if not wealthy
      - ii. then we have other things with a great pull on our lives whether gaming, talking, quilting
      - iii. these all can become our God
    - b. misplaced priorities are sins, though some might not want to say as much
    - c. short-term problem is sin
    - d. long-term problem is separation from God
      - i. over a life-time
      - ii. for eternity
  2. Worldly things have a place
    - a. or else they would not be blessings
      - i. otherwise Jesus would have told us to burn it, not share
      - b. but it is a second place
      - c. which serve a higher good
- C. What this does NOT mean (keep this as the second part to provide a break)
  1. How many people have taken these verses

- a. all kinds of limitations to freedom
- b. cards, dancing, marriage, alcohol, etc
- 2. Even from a quick reading
  - a. Notice that Paul spent a lot of time talking about marriage
    - i. in this letter
    - ii. as a good thing
    - iii. to be likened to the Christ/Church relationship
  - b. mourning is permissible – Jesus did
  - c. joy is wonderful – listen to some of the Bible
    - i. Jesus went to the wedding of Cana
    - d. Jesus constantly talked about money
    - e. even “selfish” endeavors can promote health & well-being
- 3. Problem is that humans are usually not good at moderation

lack of context – like how the media give you the two-second cut out of what someone said – can happen with this text

e.g. more time with family – because of the long-term spiritual benefits, but it is that “spiritual” part of the argument that is the measuring stick

Later in this very same letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul speaks of marriage as a very good thing. He even compares the love of a godly husband and wife to the love between Jesus and the Church. And on the other side he points out that “an unmarried man [or woman v.34] is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord” (32). So in our reading here, Paul is simply saying, “Yes you can be married or unmarried, but don’t let it get in the way of God.”

And the same is true the rest of our reading: “those who mourn, [should live] as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.” (29-31). Is it okay to mourn, to rejoice, to make money? Go with Jesus to the funeral of his friend and see him weep. Watch Jesus go to the greatest celebration of life as he attends a marriage feast, apparently for several days. As to money, I can only think of one place where someone in the Bible was told to sell all his possessions. But dozens, hundreds of times the Bible tells us how to use earthly wealth wisely.

Put First Things First. And the first thing is God and his kingdom. That is why the first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods.” That is why the Lord’s Prayer begins, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come.” God is first, but not to the neglect of the other things. (Remember the children’s devotion?) God isn’t the only thing in our life, just first.

How often I have not done that! The things I have most enjoyed in life have nearly always, at some point, gotten in the way of God and being a loving member of a larger community. I have this human flesh that corrupts every one of God's blessings and I become engrossed in the things of this world. How glad I am that Jesus calls us through the tumult of the world's wild, restless sea! He seeks me out like a good shepherd. He brings me to repentance and tells me that I am forgiven.

Listen to that voice. Step back from the things of this world. Realize that the time is short. Put first things first in your life. Amen.

Dear Friends In Christ,

Many people have said it. We experienced it. One of the great things about moving is that you get to throw out so much junk. All those useless things just sitting out in the shed or even right in the middle of your living room for years, you can throw them in the garbage and not feel bad about it. That old two-man saw, clothes that haven't fit for a decade, 14 year old magazines you never looked at even when they came in the mail in 2001 – they all get a one-way ticket to the Thursday morning trash pick-up. You get to re-draw the lines, start with a clean slate. And this time, this time, you are going to keep your priorities straight. You are going to

Put First Things First

Just as surely as moving won't permanently cure those sorts of problems, becoming a Christian doesn't magically make us people with right priorities. We need to keep on re-drawing the lines, throwing out the useless junk.

Part I. Put First Things First, Because the Time Is Short

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short!" (29). The end is near and we need to be ready. In a sports competition, when the time is nearly up, everyone gets very concerned about the score—and for good reason. On November 6, 1869 (145 years ago), what is considered the first competitive football game was played. Scoring was different then. In that game Rutgers College beat Princeton 6-4. That score will stand forever. A thousand years from now, if God should allow the world to remain that long, that score will be unchanged. It is unchangeable. Princeton will forever be the losers. "Brothers, the time is short!...This world in its present form is passing away" (29,31). The clock is ticking down. The final buzzer is Jesus coming at the end of the world. Whether you are God's child or not at the end of your life will have results that cannot be changed.

That is why the Apostle Paul urges us with such earnestness. He probably does a far better job than I do. I think that there is always tomorrow. As the sun rose yesterday, so it will rise in the morning. "I am working on it, God. One of these days I will get it right."

Thank the Lord we age. As we age, we begin to hear the ticking clock. Usually we don't when we are young. As the body starts to not work so well, as family and friends depart this life, we begin to hear the clock. That is part of why we act differently when they get older. We start to realize that the time really is short, even if it is 80 years, even if it is 110 years. It is short.

Recently a prominent radio personality reflected on the fact that he was near retirement age. He claimed he had never given a thought to his aging. But just recently he became aware that, in his words, "Not all my dreams are going to come true." Without much thinking of it, he had always treated his dreams as though there was a real possibility they could happen. But in his seventh decade, he was starting to realize some were impossible. The time was too short.

Less frequently, but just as truly, the ticking clock breaks into the lives of young people. Most of us, before we were 20, went to school with a child or youth who passed away. Do you remember your classmate who had leukemia, or the high school basketball star whose heart defect suddenly showed itself when he went up for a lay-up in practice? Whatever tragedy was associated with those people, there is also a gracious God reminding us all, "The time is short... This world in its present form is passing away." God reminds us to put first things first. Where we stand at the end of life does make a difference.

That is why Jesus is so important. Only he is the way, the truth and the life. Only in Jesus' payment for our sins can we look forward to eternity in joy. So we stay close to him.

God's goal in all things is that things turn out well. Think about a parent who reminds a child to get an important assignment done. The child views it as nagging. But the parent's desire is nothing other than the good of the child, that they would put first things first.

All that a pastor or elder says whether in a sermon or a personal visit is with the same goal. We don't like pressuring people and we don't like people pressuring us. But if left to our own devices, what would our priorities look like?

Let us put First Things First so that we may be prepared for that last moment of life.

## Part II: Put First Things First, Not Distracted by Earthly Things

If you have become familiar with the life of Jesus, you know that he did that to. He directed people to keep First Things First. When one man came and asked what he should do, Jesus told him to sell what he had and give it to the poor. Now remember, Jesus did not tell every rich person to do that. But Jesus could look into that man's heart and see what was confusing him. And for that man, it was his wealth.

And if Jesus could look into our hearts, he could say something like that to all of us. Maybe it would be a pursuit of wealth. Or maybe social media, or talking, or gaming, or quilting. That is one of the hallmarks of humanity: there is always something we do in excess. And sometimes it is ridiculous things that make the rest of us say, "Really?!?"

These misplaced priorities are sin. We often pawn them off as weaknesses, but they are sin. They are sin because these things cause us to sin against our neighbor or our God. Too much time at work can be at the expense of our family. Child and Family Services won't come knocking, but God knows. Too much going out having a good time comes at the expense of our offerings to God, both in time and money.

And the long-term problem with it is that it can have long-term results. That is why this congregation and pastor care. Rarely do people fall from faith in a single moment. Falling from faith is usually an accumulation of bad spiritual habits. Less time at church, more attention to worldly things snowballs. It grows. At some point it reaches a point of no return. I don't know when that is; only God knows. But God has told us to keep people away from that tipping point.

So Paul urges us to keep first things first. He says, "From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none..." Did he just say what I think he said? It sounds like he just said married people shouldn't pay much attention to their marriages.

You have all watched news reports. Those things scare me. Think about it. If someone gives a two hour press conference, the media picks out the juiciest 2 ½ seconds and repeats it every 30 minutes for all the world to hear. I mean, if I had an interview like that, they could make me sound like a holocaust denier, or a raving lunatic, or even a Chicago Bears fan.

That is what happens with the Apostle Paul here. People take these three verses out of the 40 verse long press release of 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Now, we don't have time to go through the whole thing, so let me sum up. In this chapter Paul is talking about marriage. His point is that whether a person marries or decides to say single, he or she should first of all think about their relation with Jesus.