

## **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12**

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the skilful; but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

## **Mark 1: 14-15**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

## **Once Upon a Time, There Was....**

**Rev. David Dalke**

**August 26, 2007**

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Now there's one more scripture, and it's not printed, because I want you to sing it with me. I want you to turn in your hymnals, or look on the screen to page 657. And this scripture comes to us from the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm and also is a basis for what I want to say today.

This is the day that the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it, This is the day that the Lord has made.

Indeed it is. You know, Eastern philosophy asks us two questions. One is, "Where are you?" and the answer is "Here." The second question is, "What time is it?" and the answer is, "Now." We have a Here, and we have a Now, and it's my belief that that's really all we know about. I know that yesterday and the day before that we have put a lot of memories in our memory bank and they're part of who we are. And tomorrow is only a fantasy. We have not experienced it. So what we know is the here and the now, this moment. Once upon a time there were some people, and it might have been us, who took for granted the here and the now, who didn't respect or honor the moment. And those people, those people out there, not us of course – those people would get up in the morning, and they would stretch, and they'd put their slippers on and they would amble out to the driveway and get their newspaper, and they'd come back in and they'd open it up and they'd have their cup of coffee and then their juice, and they'd read the paper, and then they would go and they would sit on their carpet in a yoga position and they would start to chant. And their mantra would be like this: "Why should I do today, when I could do it tomorrow or the next day, or the next day? Why should I do today what I can do tomorrow, or the next day or the next day?"

A woman knocked on our door. I had been warned by my spouse, who said, "I won't be here, but I think someone will come and knock on the door, and she's going to deliver a video to you and to me, and I just want you to know that she will be coming." And she said, "She's a very, very nice woman." She said, "She was here yesterday and we had a great visit and she found out I was a nurse and she said, 'Well, you know what? I'm going to bring you a video about blood transfusions.'" And, she said, "She's going to be delivering that video and I want you to get it for me," and I said "I'd be glad to do that." And then Cheryl said, "And by the way, she's also a Jehovah's Witness." And so the doorbell rang, and I sort of tiptoed to the door. You know how we do that, to make sure no one really thinks we're there? I shuffled quietly to the door and I peered out the curtain, and sure enough, there she was, with a video in hand. I opened the door to greet her, and also noticed as I opened the door, some pamphlets in her other hand. She said, "This is a video I wanted to bring to Cheryl, and we had such a good visit yesterday." I said "Thank you very much," and I reached through the door and I grabbed that video, rather quickly, and I started to walk away, and she said, "Oh, one more thing."

One...more...thing. Folks, those are the scariest three words you can hear, when someone's at your door with pamphlets in their hand. I went back and she looked at me and said, "Do you think we are in our last days? Because that's what we believe. And I said, "No I don't, but I want you to know that if that's what you believe, it's perfectly okay with me." And I took the video, and I started to put it on the kitchen counter and I thought to myself, "Now, I know she is talking about a catastrophic event of the world coming to an end. But what I'm hearing in that is, am I in my last days? What about me, and what about you, and how am I treating these last days?"

I sat across the table from my eighty-eight-year-old mother-in-law in Norfolk, Nebraska. She has been, in her past history, the secretary, or we call it the administrative assistant, to the principal of the high school in Norfolk, Nebraska (where Johnny Carson went to school) and she worked there a long time. She said, "I want you to see this letter that a teacher wrote me." And I looked at the letter and it said, "Beth, every time I came into your office, you were so welcoming. You greeted me as though I was the only person in your life. If I was hurting, you took me in. If I was tired, you welcomed me to sit down. Beth, I just want you to know, when I was in your office, I felt like the most important person in the world." And then at the bottom of the letter it said, "I also have found out that when you have these feelings about someone, you really ought to tell them." But I didn't do that. I didn't do that. I moved from Indianapolis, Indiana the middle of my sophomore year and went into Wichita, Kansas to a huge church, and the pastor there was the most wonderful person I know. Ron Meredith was his name. He took me under his wing, he nurtured me. We talked, we'd go out for lunch once in a while. He guided me into seminary. He was the one that started every prayer with that poem that I have given to you every now and then right here.

"If radio's slim fingers  
Can pluck a melody  
From night and toss it over  
A continent or sea;  
If the petaled white notes

Of a violin  
Are blown across a mountain  
Or a city's din;  
If songs, like crimson roses,  
Are culled from clear blue air,  
Why should mortals wonder  
If God hears prayer?"

Every Sunday he said that poem, every Sunday before his prayer. He was the most wonderful person. I got a call from my Dad. Ron had retired and moved to western Kansas to be on a ranch, and Dad called and said, "I want you to know, David, that Ron yesterday broke his leg and he's in the hospital." I said, "You know, I'm going to write him a note. I've never told him how much he means to me. Ever, ever, I've never said that, and I'm going to write him a letter." I pored over that letter and put down every feeling that I had and I put it in the mailbox on Thursday night, and he died on Friday. He never got it. Two weeks later, his wife wrote me a note and she said, "David, I want you to know that I got the letter. I don't think Ron ever knew how much he meant to you. I'm sorry he didn't get the letter."

My friend David Rackley, his body riddled with disease, thirty-five years old, lying on a hospital bed, a few days to live, looked at me and he said, "I missed it. I messed it up. I went to too many meetings, I went to cities and traveled, I didn't spend enough time or pay enough attention to my children and my spouse. I missed it." Well, the book of Ecclesiastes that old Hebrew philosopher who wrote those words two hundred years before Jesus was born, he reminds us. He was in a time of turmoil and political unrest and social upheaval, and he writes these words to us, but he says, "I'm not going to problem-solve for you, I'm just going to point out what's going on, and remind all of you that life is so temporary. It is temporary." And in the words we read today, he said, "None of us knows when our time will come." None of us knows when our time will come.

Chuck alluded in the announcements today about Mostlies. We went to hear that wonderful group of comedy just about three weeks ago. We have some people in this congregation that are in the Mostlies. Craig and Lorriane Schuler, and Betsy Kellog directs it. They do parodies on songs, and they're really funny. One of them they did was on Harry Chapin's "The Cat's in the Cradle." They did a funny job on it, but you know it's really a serious song. It's a very philosophical song, from a writer who also died in a severe fiery car crash in New York City in the early Eighties. The song is, "A child was born just the other day, and he came into the world in the usual way. But I had planes to catch, and I had bills to pay. He learned to walk while I was away. And then he learned to talk and as he grew he said, 'I'm going to be like you, Dad. Some day I'm going to be like you. When are you coming home, Dad?'" "I don't know, Son, but we'll have a good time then." Well my son turned ten the other day. He said "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play. Will you teach me to throw?" And I said, "Got things to do, not today." And he said, "Well that's okay, but when you coming home, Dad?" "I don't know, Son, but we'll get together then. We'll have a really good time then." Well he came home from college the other day. So proud of him, I just had to say, "Will you sit

for a while?" and he said with a smile, "Well, I'd really like to, Dad, but what I want is to borrow the car keys? See ya later, may I have them please?" "When you coming home, Son?" "I don't know, Dad, but we'll get together then. You know we'll get together then." Well, I've long since retired, my son's moved away, I called him up the other day and I said "Sure like to see you," and he said, "I'd love to, Dad, but the job's a hassle, and the kids have the flu. But it's sure nice talking to you. Sure nice talking to you." And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, my grown-up boy's just like me. A grown-up boy, just like me."

My Aunt Eula, bless her heart, left us all a legacy. My Aunt Eula's legacy was this: that when she put her head on her pillow at night, she never had to say, "I wish I would have...I wish I would have..." Once upon a time there were people like us that didn't pay attention to the here and the now. We didn't write the letter, we didn't make the call, we didn't reach out to the person. We had thoughts and we didn't speak them. But once upon a time, there might have been some people like us who also knew, that, "Okay, so I didn't do it right, but if I pay attention to the Gospel of Mark, I've got another chance. Because in that Gospel, as Mark summarizes Jesus' words, he says, "The kingdom is now, but repent." Meaning, you can be redeemed, you can try it on again. We can do it again, we get a second chance.

You know, Bobby Plump is really famous. I bet all of you have heard of him, right? I don't see anybody shaking their head. Bobby Plump is so famous, that someone tried to write him, in the state of Indiana. They knew he lived somewhere in the state but they weren't sure where, and they just wrote "Bobby Plump, Plump, Indiana," and he got it. He got the letter. In 1954, nestled in the south eastern part of the state of Indiana was a little town. The town was Milan, and in that little town in 1954 there was a high school. They had 161 students. 75 of those students were boys, and they had a boys' basketball team. And in 1954, little Milan High School went to the state finals in Indianapolis, and played the Goliath of all Goliaths, Muncie Central High School from Muncie, Indiana. It was a time when there were no classes, there was no 1A, 2A, 3A. The Davids went out and tried to slay the Goliaths, and it never had happened, and here they were in the state finals. I used to sit in that field house and watch those games, the most exciting thing I can talk about, and in that particular game as the buzzer sounded Bobby Plump hit a shot for Milan, and they beat Muncie Central for the state championship.

Now they made a movie about that, many of you recognize that. That movie was *Hoosiers*, and in the movie *Hoosiers* of course Jimmy Chipwood is the one that hits it for little Hickory High School in the last minute, as they also dethrone a major power. I heard Brad Long talk about that movie *Hoosiers*. Brad Long was number 15 in the movie. He was the one named Buddy, and Buddy got kicked off the team. Brad Long was talking about that movie and he said, "You know *Hoosiers* is a wonderful movie. It's all about what happened at Milan High School. We put in the Hollywoodish stuff, but you know what, it's a lot of basketball, but that's not really what the movie's about. Because the movie," he said, "is about redemption. It's about redemption. It's about second chances." He said, "I got kicked off the team in that movie, and I got brought back on. And Coach Norman Dale (Gene Hackman played that role)" he said "You know what?

He had hit some kid when he was in college coaching and they disbarred him from ever coaching in the college ranks again. And he came to little Hickory High School to coach. He got a second chance.” And he said, “The town drunk, whose son played on the basketball team, and who this town drunk embarrassed his son time after time, got another chance. He was asked to help coach the team. There’s a community in a team, we pull together. It’s all about redemption,” he said. “It’s about redemption.” Well, the score was 30 to 30. Bobby Plump held onto the ball for four minutes, because there was no shot clock back then, and he just held the ball for four minutes, and then he shot it, and he missed. He missed it, and Muncie Central got the rebound, they came down and they shot, they missed, and little Milan got the ball and they came back and Bobby Plump held the ball for another solid minute, and as the clock ran down, with one second to go, he shot it and the buzzer went off and the ball went in. And little Milan had won, because Bobby Plump got a second chance. It’s exactly what Jesus was talking about. We all get second chances, folks. That’s what the scripture is about. It’s what Ecclesiastes reminds us. We don’t know when our time will come. Make the most of it. Do the best you can. And know that you get a second chance.

I close with this. It was a hard time for me, it was a lot of struggle, and I wasn’t sure what decision to make. And so I called up a good friend of mine, I said, “Bruce, I need to talk. I’m trying to make a life-changing decision but I don’t know what, where it’s coming out, I need to talk about it.” He said, “I’ll be right there.” We drove around for two and a half hours, and I talked and drove, and he sat and he listened, and I talked and he listened, and I talked and he listened. And when I was finished I looked at him with hopefulness in my heart and I said, “So what do you think I should do?” and he said, “How much time do you have?” I said, “I don’t know what you mean.” He said, “How much time do you have?” I said, “I’ve got another thirty…” He said, “That’s not what I’m talking about and you know it. How much time do you have?” And finally it hit me that what he was saying was, how much time do you have to do the things that are important in your life? To do what’s important in your life. My friends, this is the day. This is the day. Amen