TITLE: SECOND CHANCES

TEXT: Eccl. 12:1-14; Ex. 7:14; Jn. 3:16-19; Heb. 4:7;

2 Co. 6:2; Lk. 12:16-21

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about second chances.

 I love instant replays in a football game. I think that they may be the best thing that has happened to football since the game began. You can leave the television to go refill your coffee cup or fill your bowl of popcorn and if something exciting happens while you are gone chances are they will still be replaying it when you get back into the living room.

 You will not only get to see the original play but will get to see it over and over again, and at least once in slow motion.

 And if it is a really good play you can watch it again when they show the sports hi-lights on the evening news.

 I had this thought…What would it be like to be able to have delayed replays of some of the more significant times in our life? Think of the possibilities of being able to relive a particular experience in life that you could have handled differently, handled better than you did. Maybe more wisely or with greater tact or in better taste.

 You know what I’m talking about, all those, “if I had it to do over again” experiences in life.

 Just think of all the problems in life that could be erased.

 Think of all the things that you would refrain from saying that you’d just blurted out the first time around or that you would say differently or not say at all if you had a second chance.

 Columnist, Erma Bombeck once wrote:

 *“If I had my life to live over again, I would have waxed less and listened more. Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy and complaining about the shadows over my feet, I’d have cherished every minute of it and realized that the wonderment growing inside of me was to be my only chance in life to assist God in a miracle….*

*I would have cried and laughed less while watching television …and more while watching life…*

*There would have been more, I love you’s…more I’m sorry’s…more I’m listening…*

*But mostly; given another shot at life, I would seize every minute of it…and never give that minute back until there was nothing left of it…”*

 Unfortunately, life doesn’t offer “delayed replays.” Second times around don’t happen.

 God can and does forgive. People can, and often do, overlook our failures. But once a moment is lived it cannot be lived again. Once a harsh or hurtful word is spoken that word is released into eternity with no chance of getting it back. Like a bullet fired from a gun, once it leaves the barrel of our mouth it is cannot be reclaimed…

 And it is because that once the moment has passed, time has been spent, it is gone forever never to be reclaimed, that we should use it wisely….

 It is because of this understanding of “second chances” the writer of Ecclesiastes says this…

**Eccl. 12:1 -14 (NIV)
1Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—2before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 3when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;4when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; 5when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.**

 **6Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, 7and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”**

Solomon here declares…

**1Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—**

What are the days Solomon is referring to that he calls the days of trouble, the years that he says we will say I find no pleasure in them?

 He is talking about old age…That time when death is the next great event of life before us…

When…**the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark…. 3when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop…. when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint…**

Solomon here talks about that time in life when sight and hearing start to diminish. When strength has faded away and lust for life is but a distant memory and one realizes that there is no second chance to live it over again!

 Example: I remember several years ago going out to the nursing home to visit an old friend who was dying. He was a strong man, farmed and worked hard all of his life. He was 94 years old…

 His mind was still pretty sharp but his body was simply wearing out…He had to strain to hear even with hearing aides. His eyes had grown dim with age. He had had several episodes with his heart the past couple weeks and he just wanted to die.

 Several times as I visited with him he said he wished he would just pass on. He was dying and he knew that he was dying…

 I told him that we are all dying, we are all in some stage of the death process. The fact is the countdown to death starts for all of us the day that we are born.

 The day that we are born we are one day closer to the day of our death.

 Because death is a certainty for all of us I shared with him how the most important question in life is not will or even when we will die, but the most important question of life is, will we be ready for that time when it comes.

 And the only way that we can be ready then is to embrace Jesus as our Lord and Savior now….

 So I asked him if I could pray with him and he kind of reluctantly agreed that I could. I asked him if he had ever accepted Jesus into his heart…He said no… I asked him if he would like to do that now….He said no…..

 I prayed and gave him the opportunity to accept Christ in that prayer, let him know that if and when he reached out to Jesus that Jesus would be there to receive him.

 And then I left but I left with a heavy heart.

 We hear about deathbed conversions. People who have rejected Christ all of their life but then when face to face with death they embrace Him as their Lord and Savior.

 Most of the time I think that it is just something that we say to each other to make us feel better. Well, you never know for sure, maybe they accepted Jesus just moments before they died. Maybe with their dying breath they cried out to the Lord….

 That is always a possibility but if we place our money in that bank, the bank of last second conversions, I think that we will probably find ourselves very disappointed when we see the account balance in eternity..

 Here was a man who is dying, knows that he is dying, even is anticipating death just to get it all over with, yet even now when asked if he would like to make sure things were right with God before he died by embracing Jesus he said no….

 My mind has trouble processing that…..

 If at anytime in a persons life that you would think that they would be open to Jesus it would be then..

 Scripture talks about the most severe of human conditions… The hardened heart…

 A heart that has become so hardened, so calloused over, that it cannot do what is necessary to receive Gods forgiveness and acceptance.

 Pharaoh had such a heart!

 It has always interested me in the account of the Hebrews Exodus from Egypt how the ten plagues that Moses performs in Pharaoh’s sight are described.

 What interests me is the terminology used describing Pharaoh’s heart….

 After each of the first five plagues it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart and he would not let Gods people go…

 Then with the last 5 plagues it says it slightly differently. It says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart that he would not allow Gods people to go.

 Why the difference in wording?

 There was still hope for Pharaoh to repent and embrace God during the First 5 plagues. Pharaoh had not crossed that invisible line of no return yet.

 But sometime between the 5th and 6th Plague Pharaoh crossed that line. His heart had become so hard to God that God knew that Pharaoh would never repent and come to Him.

 So from that moment on it says that God hardened Pharaohs heart. God then simply used Pharaoh as an instrument of destruction to fulfill His purpose and plan among His people.

 But it wasn’t until after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart so much that he would never turn to God.

Pharaoh sealed his own fate in eternity because of his hardened heart….

**Ex. 7:14 (NIV)
14Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go.**

Unyielding***=kaw-bade***

***'heavy*; figuratively in a good sense (*numerous*) or in a bad sense (*severe*, *difficult*, *stupid*):— grievous, hard.**

The danger of a heart that is continually unyielding to God is that it can become so conditioned to not yielding to God that it never will regardless of the circumstances.

 Even when facing the uncertainty of death itself!

**John 3:16 -19 (NIV)
16“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.**

Example:

 When the Bastille, a castle-like prison in Paris, was about to be destroyed in 1789, a convict was brought out who had been confined in one of its gloomy cells for many years. But instead of joyfully welcoming his liberty, he begged to be taken back. It had been such a long time since he had seen the sunshine that his eyes could not endure its brightness. His only desire was to die in the murky dungeon where he had been held captive.

 In the same way, some men continue to reject the Lord until they eventually become so hardened in their heart that they actually prefer to live in darkness rather than come into the light of life in Christ.

 I ran across some very interesting statistics….

Percentages by age group of people who, if they could start over in life, would do things "much differently":

 In the age group….

 **16-31: 59% said if they could start over in life they would do things much differently!**

 **32-50: 71% said if they could start over in life they would do things much differently!**

 **51+ : 59% said if they could start over in life they would do things much differently!**

What do these statistics seem to indicate?

That there comes a time when change or desire to change diminishes.

 That if we continually reject changes in our life there will come a time when we no longer see the need to change.

 I think that this speaks of the condition of the human heart and how, through constant and continual rejection, one can be hardened to the place that change is highly unlikely or even becomes impossible.

Have you ever heard the old saying “never put off until tomorrow what you can do today?

 The reasoning behind this old saying is very sound, even very Scriptural. Especially when it comes to a heart that needs to be yielded to God.

 Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today because we may not have another tomorrow to do it.

**Heb. 4:7 (NIV)
….. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”**

**2 Cor. 6:-2 (NIV)**

**….I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.**

The day, the time of salvation for us is now, it is today because none of us are promised that we will have another tomorrow..

Jesus illustrates this important truth to us in a Parable..

**Luke 12:16 -21 (NIV)
16And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’**

**18“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’**

**20“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’**

**21“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”**

This speaks of the uncertainty of life! This tells us why it is not just important, but essential, that we settle the Jesus issue now because tomorrow it may be too late for us to do it.. We may not have another tomorrow.. And even if we do our heart may have become too hard to embrace it.

Michael Green said:

 *The love of God, with arms extended on a cross, bars the way to hell. But if that love is ignored, rejected, and finally refused, there comes a time when love can only weep while man pushes into the self-chosen alienation which Christ went to the cross to avert.*

 From the day we are born Gods love is reaching out to us and all men with His salvation…

 But it will not do us any good unless at some point in life we reach out and receive it and embrace it.

 The biggest obstacle in the way of our receiving the salvation that God has for us in Christ Jesus is usually our prideful self.

 We want to retain control! Not coming to a place of ultimate surrender whereby we simply advocate control of our life to Christ…

 How many times does our pride get into the way of what God wants us to do in our life?

 The story is told of the captain of the ship who looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north."

 The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am seaman third class Jones."

 Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a lighthouse."

How many times is it our own pride that becomes an obstacle in our life? Especially where God is concerned?

 In the midst of life in a very secular world all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest--something almost absurd to us—something that we often don’t really want to hear.. Alter your course---change direction…Surrender control--and do it now..

 It often strikes us right at the source of our pride and self sufficiency and our natural response is often to simply ignore it.

 But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and if we ignore it we ignore it at our own peril.

 Life doesn’t offer delayed replays.. Second times around don’t happen…Yesterday is in time past and tomorrow is not promised for any of us..

 So the only certainty that any of us have is today and the moment in which we are in….

 So God calls out to us through His word…

**Today, if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts.”**

**….I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.**

 If you hear God calling to you today then answer Him today! Embrace Him today! Accept Him Today!

 If you have embraced Jesus as the lord and Savior of your life and He has laid a burden on your heart for a lost friend or loved one then don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today… Go and tell them about Jesus love for them.

 Today may be the last chance that they will ever have to hear that message.

EXAMPLE: Christian lady tells about when she was a young believer living on a farm and one night a man that was having car trouble walked up to her door at night to use the phone…She said she felt this overwhelming sense that she should tell him about Jesus, but embarrassed and afraid, she didn’t do it. The next morning the man was found dead in his car…

 She says; I pray that God sent someone else to tell this man about Jesus before he died since she had refused to do so…..

 She said she would never “not tell” people about Jesus ever again when having that feeling to do so….

Solomon ends the Book of Ecclesiastes with these words… **Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. 13Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:**

 **Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.**

When all of life is said and done here is the conclusion of the matter, here is what is really important!

 **Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man!**

 Today is tomorrow’s memory in the making, how will you remember it?

 Will it be a day of fulfilled opportunities, a day of salvation, or a day of missed opportunities?

The choice is up to us….

Second chances---not a chance! Once the moment has passed we cannot get that moment back…

 Delayed replays only happen on television…

God operates in the now! We live in the now! All of our now’s are memories in the making.

 What kind of memories will they be?

I would like to close with these words of Instruction from Scripture this morning…..

**Col. 4:2 -6 (NIV)
2Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

This morning, are you making the most of every opportunity? Once a moment is lived it is time that has been spent! How have we spent, how are we spending the time God has given us?