

The King's Highway

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TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

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"Brethren, the time is short" (I. Cor. 7:29)

Much of our modern living seems to take the form of a race against time. We are forever competing with the clock or the calendar. Indeed this fact constitutes, for many of us, one of life's minor, if not major, irritations. To carry out this assignment, to read this book, to teach this lesson, to make this sale, or even to complete this vacation, we have just so much time and no more. There may be exceptions, but this is pretty much the rule in our hard-pressed clock-punching world.

Paul felt that time, like the last bit of sand in an hour-glass, was running out. He felt therefore that measures strong and serious—yes, even extreme—should be taken to make every precious moment yield its full sixty seconds of value. Are there not good reasons for believing that we should feel the same way in this day of destiny in which our lives have been cast?

I.

To start where the circle of our thought is the largest, we apparently are justified in looking at our civilization as a whole, and saying, "Brethren, the time is short."

It is not easy for our minds to conceive of the disaster that threatens now to engulf the world. This is particularly true of Americans, who never did develop any talent for pessimism. Optimism is a good thing—a much better thing than a chronic pessimism. Yet pessimism is not always the twin of common sense. There is a blind determination to look on the bright side that stupidly ignores actual dangers. Dr. W. E. Sangster, of London, tells in one of his books about a man whose wife was gravely ill. When Dr. Sangster called on her, the husband said cheerily, "She is bound to get better. I am an optimist, you know. I always look on the bright side of things." "Nevertheless," reports the pastor, "I buried that man's wife before the week was out."

There ought to be some place allowed for the difference between being an optimist and being a fool. Our most discerning and realistic thinkers are giving us straight talk these days. They are warning us that nothing short of a tremendous spiritual recovery will save us from the shattering of our civilization.

Sometimes it appears that the ominous rush of events and the tragic dribbling away of our golden hours are more sharply felt by the scientists than by representatives of the Church. If the politicians and preachers and priests, along with millions of money-grabbing, pleasure-intoxicated Americans, are dull to the fact that the time is short, the men who are

working on the weapons of war are stingingly awake and are trying to wake up the rest of us to the fact that civilization may not be more than a short time away from its catastrophic ending.

In the light of these conditions, do not Paul's words take on a new and biting meaning: "Brethren, the time is short"? You say, "Yes, but what do you want us to do?" It is a good question. The other day I read an editorial entitled "Hydrogen and Hysteria." The gist of it was that the sensational revelations of recent months with respect to the superbomb and its terrors have been, in the main, wrongly slanted. They have been twisted to mean nothing more than this: that we should get more and more infuriated at Russia and throw more and more millions of money into building a purely material defense against her. If that is all that we can see in the threat of doom that hangs over the world, then it is a form of hysteria.

What is needed is a much more wholesome use of the fears that now have taken hold of men's hearts. All of our world leaders need to humble themselves before Almighty God. One day of meditation, contrition and prayer in the United Nations, if rightly entered into, could go far toward changing the spiritual climate of the world. And think of how much farther it would go if it were backed by the concentrated and contrite prayers of a hundred million people in those lands which are represented at Lake Success. Our godless cleverness has had its day—and failed. God's Christ is the way out. But "the time is short!"

II.

Think, in the next place, of our nation, and see if there is not a solid message for the United States in this cautioning word of the apostle.

In many ways we have been a spendthrift people. The vast territory to which our fathers came seemed to hold endless possibilities for exploitation. We were reckless with our wild life. The law of action was "Shoot and kill, and shoot and kill." So it came to pass that by the time the states and the Federal Government got around to the business of setting up game preserves, and parks, and establishing set times for hunting, some species of animals and birds had been rendered virtually extinct. It is stated on good authority that when the white settlers were forming their first colonies here, there were not less than 75,000,000 head of buffalo roaming the land. Today there are approximately 4,000 left.

Similarly, we have been reckless of our topsoil. What we have not exhausted by overplanting we have permitted to get away from us by a preventable erosion. Land experts estimate that for years we have allowed

400,000,000 tons of the "good earth" to be washed into the Gulf of Mexico annually. In our greed for quick profits we adopted, in farming, the law of "Plow and plant, and plow and plant." When the land gave out, we simply moved West and took more land. But that time is past; the Pacific Ocean has seen to that!

We have done much the same thing with our forests where for years the law of operation was: "Cut and sell, and cut and sell."

Before I carry you any farther let me pause to remind you that in these areas of our national life we have begun in comparatively recent times, to wake up. We discovered that time was running out. With a wanton wastefulness we were destroying our natural resources, and the day of reckoning was just around the corner.

But we are moving fast in some other directions, with little indication that we realize that there, too, time is running out on us. Some years ago we embarked upon a national policy of "Spend and tax, and spend and tax." With our federal debt mounting by the hundreds of millions even in peace time, we need the courage to say to ourselves, "Brother Americans, the time is short! We cannot keep this up and hold on to the America that our fathers bled to create."

But fabulous debt and equally fabulous taxes are not our worst national threat. Our gravest peril is the general weakening of our moral fiber. When it was reported recently that congressmen had been observed in a state of obvious intoxication while presuming to transact the nation's business, one of our big city columnists made it a point to conduct a personal investigation. The best that he was able to report back to some of his disturbed readers was that there is no more drinking to excess among these top legislators than might be found in an average group of men of similar size. It was not denied that congressmen have been on the floor while in a more or less befogged state of mind induced by over-imbibing. It just is not pleasant to think of men as weak as that making critically important decisions at the national and international level.

This cancer of moral uncleanness has been spreading through our land. Are we going to check it or not? Time is running out on us. What Washington needs is not so much a political as a spiritual house-cleaning of the kind that will put the fear of God in the hearts of those who occupy the seats of the mighty. We need to set our house in order on these dear shores where wave the Stars and Stripes. We need to listen to some prophet of God who will say to us, as Isaiah did to Irsael long ago, 'Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,

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