

Selected Sermons #20

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

John 12:27-36 Judica

Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

In the name of and for the sake of our Redeemer –

“Could you not watch with me one hour? One brief hour?” Thus did our Savior plead with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane – but Peter and his associates, in their human weakness, did not think that it was one brief hour. To them time seemed endless for their eyes were heavy, and they went from one sleep into another while Jesus wrestled with the fear of death.

There are many brief hours in life which are full of deep meaning and yet slip by quickly, but in our human weakness we often do not appreciate how short and concentrated the time is during which great things happen. Certainly the disciples did not realize what tremendous things could happen in that brief hour! Whatever was about to take place, they felt it could not be over too soon, and they would miss little by taking a short nap. Whatever the danger, it could not approach so fast but would take time. This mistake caused great mischief. They were not ready for they did not watch and pray; they failed to stand in faithful loyalty to the Lord.

God works his greatest works in so short a time that sinful man finds it hard to grasp. He created the world; he saved the human race; he works salvation in us – and how few of the countless hours of time did he actually need for all of this? The time for God’s great deeds is always short.

We must learn from this fact and profit by this knowledge – that we may not, as others have, fail to know the time of God’s gracious visitations. Our text assists and admonishes us by impressing upon us –

The vast importance of two short hours of God:

I. The hour of wrath against Christ

II. The hour of grace for us

I. Our text opens very suddenly with the cry from Jesus’ lips, “*Now my soul is troubled.*” Need we ask what troubled his soul? Was he not at that moment standing on the threshold of his bloody Passion, already feeling the beginning of the agony that would enclose him so unspeakably on the cross? Jesus, knowing all things that were to be accomplished, knowing every lash of the whip and every indignity, knowing even of his being lifted up from the earth in the terrible shame and suffering of the cross, was pondering the sacrifice he must so soon bring. Jesus knew all of the details of his humiliation - for this reason he had come to live with us for a time. Yet, he trembled as he came nearer and nearer to the cross. **The full fury of what he must endure assailed him.**

We, who can never fully sense in its true fullness the **suffering** of the innocent Son of God, cannot feel the real

horror of what **afflicted Jesus** at this time in Gethsemane. However, in part at least, we are able to judge the unspeakable anguish which assailed him when we hear him utter the thoughts which he expressed as the great battle was about to begin. Shall he say, "*Father, save me from this hour*"? Will he utter that prayer and thus yield up forever the love that had moved him to come down to this earth? Will he exercise his right to turn back and leave the world to die in its sin?

He will not do it; the strength of God, his own strength of love, holds him steadfast and gladly to his purpose. God's name will be made glorious in his redemption for all people, for his mercy is so much greater than sin. Jesus is determined to suffer every torture and shame so that God's name may be held in honor forever as he keeps his promises at any and all cost.

The prayer for escape does rise to our Savior's lips, though he refuses to speak it, for he is on earth in the weakness of human flesh and blood. When he looks ahead to the valley of sorrow into which he is to go, it looks endless and bottomless. Already he has put in some thirty years of humiliation and temptation on earth, but those years are as nothing in his mind as compared with what still lies ahead. From where he stood until the final

moment of his last breath seemed like a thousand years of binding agony.

Yet think of **how short that time actually was!** Our Lord knew it well. He even referred to his final suffering as *this hour*. **So quickly** would it begin and so **soon** would it be over – that the people who saw it would not realize what had all happened in that **brief span of time**. Therefore the Father would mark it all along the way with signs and wonders. At this moment, God spoke with a voice from heaven. It was like a starting gun, that the people might sit up and take notice. Jesus explained the voice from heaven. *“This voice did not come because of me, but for your sake now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”*

Though to Jesus in the weakness of human flesh, this Passion seemed long, we are to marvel over what God did in **so brief a time**. Count the hours; mark the moments between the first drop of sweat from the Lamb of God in the Garden to the last cold sweat of death that gathered on his brow at three o’clock the next afternoon. What is that in the span of the world’s existence, or even in the normal human span of life? Consider what did God crowd into that short amount of time!

You are a sinner and yet you have often been angry at other people's sins. Can you picture the fire of the wrath of Almighty God which had gathered itself like a storm-cloud over the sea of sin because of the sins of the guilty human race? Would such a storm ever finish? Would such suffering ever end until every human being had had time to be born, grow up, and make a journey to stand by the cross and see the punishment? No! God laid all of this sin on his Son once and for all. All the wrath of God poured down upon our Lord Christ in those few brief hours, and then that wrath was stilled, gone, and satisfied. The world's sin was expiated **all within such a brief hour.**

Nor was that all: "Now," said Jesus; "Now" (and you will have to look quickly to see it) *"now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."* The Devil, the old evil foe, and all that he established as his kingdom in this world received a death-blow. Satan is judged, condemned, and also all of those that belong to him here on earth: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the unbelief which he offers to his followers, now all of this is made ready for the chains of hell. Now, the power of death lies broken and the door to paradise opened wide for all true believers. And all this by the mighty power of the Savior **in just a few fleeting moments** of time during which he endured the wrath of God.

Upon this short hour, then, our Gospel text fixes our attention. How slow people are to grasp what happened on the cross! Those who think of sin but lightly will miss entirely the greatness of the deed God wrought between midnight and afternoon of Good Friday. Also they upon whom sin presses as a heavy burden and who acknowledge how great their guilt is before God are often slow to appreciate how completely God did this mighty work in so short a time. For do not sinners who are troubled by their conscience still seek create their own salvation and without the help of God? They talk of satisfying the wrath of God by giving him of their own good works as payment for sin. They want to make friends with God by leading an upright life, not seeing that God is already reconciled with them, not trusting what happened during the suffering and death of Jesus. Surely some sinners are deceived by their own desire to purge away guilt with hours of wasteful expense!

Oh sinner, trust in the mighty love of God! He did indeed *glorify his name* by doing what you in eternity you could never do. As long as you live, let our Savior's brief hour on Calvary satisfy you; let it be long enough! **God can fill this short hour with his own fullness.**

II. We must confess, however, that by far our greatest weakness in misjudging the time of God's great deeds lies in the opposite direction. For every poor sinner among us who falls into unbelief and doubts that God spent his anger fully on the suffering of Jesus, there are perhaps more who live as though God's time of mercy for us is longer than it actually is. Our Gospel text warns us that **as the hour of wrath against Christ was brief, so God's hour of grace for us is also short.**

Jesus announced to his hearers that immediately after God had glorified his name by the work of redemption, the wonderful time of grace would begin for all. He said, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself."* This he said, signifying by the death he should die. Like a flood of warm sunshine, this saying of our Savior welcomes us into his outstretched arms. His cross, which became such a violent curse for him, turns into a magnet that draws and tugs at the hearts of all people. Raised up and hanging there between heaven and earth, Jesus becomes an illuminated invitation to every sin-born child of the human race.

"Look at me and be ye saved!" He cries. Tirelessly, from that day on, God has been going about with tears of love, saying and saying it again, *"Come here and take that Savior. Put his arms around you and say, 'He is mine, and*

here I am safe.” The Holy Ghost pushes and labors at human hearts, enlightening them with his Truth, enabling them to receive and possess by faith the salvation that is prepared and waiting for them by God’s sacrifice of his only Son.

Does not this eagerness of God, this mighty drawing toward the cross, mean anything? Let me tell you what thoughts we sometimes entertain about it. “Oh,” we say in our hearts, *“what a long time that has been going on! How long have been the hours of his grace! Think of the years and years since the cross was erected, and still the message goes on.”* So we feel comfortable and rest easy in the thought that the time of grace and this golden opportunity will never end. It is exactly the same error that afflicted the Jews to whom our Lord was speaking at the time of his death on the cross. They believed that once the Savior came, the real Messiah, that he would be with them always. *We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever.* These people were not in the least eager to hurry. If Christ came to them, there would be plenty of time to receive and accept him, *for he will remain forever.*

How earnestly the Lord reproves them in their folly! Without explaining further what he meant by his being *lifted up on the cross.* He seeks to direct their minds into a different attitude toward the great opportunity about to be

theirs. If they continued to feel as they did, the **hour of God's grace** for them would be over before they woke up from their own dreams. Therefore he says, *"A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."* *These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.*

A little while longer. Oh, friends, that is true; it is true for us – **God's grace is long indeed**, and Christ will abide forever, indeed, **but the time of grace for each individual is drawing short.** Where is the thoughtless one among us who says, *"God is in no hurry; he will still be inviting me when I am ready to accept, to believe, and to walk in the light as a child of the light"*? Let this person know that God does his work speedily, that his hour of grace is short. Where will you be tomorrow, if today you still withhold your heart and walk after the flesh? Your left foot may walk on this earth and your right foot may pass into eternity, for it often happens that quickly. Will you be in the flow of God's grace if you cannot pull yourself out of impenitent living? Jesus reminds us of the truth when he tells the parable of the rich fool.

To break us of the habit of thinking long, Jesus may even hide himself for a time from us – and when Jesus withdraws, life is terrifying. The light fades; darkness gathers; a cold dampness seeps into our hearts. Our feeble strength deteriorates under sorrow and grief. We lose heart so easily for every good work that is ours as father, mother, or child. We cry out in our trembling. All to hurry us, **lest the time of grace be over and past**, gone with the day's sunshine. Night comes, whether we are prepared or not. As quickly as God withdraws from our life, he can return when a sinner is penitent.

*Oh, God, forsake me not! Thy gracious presence lend me;
Lead thou thy helpless child; Thy Holy Spirit send me
That I my course may run. Be thou my Light, my Lot.
My Staff, my Rock, my Shield – O God, forsake me not!" Amen!*

Grace, 'Tis a charming sound #374

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you #444

Drawn to the Cross, which thou hast blest #390